

Chapter XI.

My tour of the East, originally planned for a twelve to eighteen weeks season in India, had extended to twenty months covering the best part of Asia, in the course of which I transported my company some 30,000 miles or more by land and sea and produced over thirty plays, staging Shakespeare in many places for the first time and frequently to alien races whose enthusiastic appreciation testified once more that not only is Shakespeare for all time but for all peoples.

Altogether it had been a remarkable and satisfying experience and after such a colourful and exciting tour I could not reconcile myself to resuming the humdrum round of the northern manufacturing centres ^{of Britain.} I was seized by the spirit of Wanderlust and was anxious to explore professionally other far-off countries, if only I could find an opening. While in this unsettled frame of mind I marked time by accepting sundry engagements. One of these was in an ambitious but not very successful production of Ivanhoe at the Lyceum Theatre, and another being an engagement to play Falstaff for a couple of weeks in a production of the first part of Henry IV. This was at the famous little Repertory Theatre in Birmingham, which had not at that time entirely dissociated itself from ^{the atmosphere of} the amateur society, headed by Sir Barry Jackson and John Drinkwater that had

given it birth. ~~However, it soon discarded the amateurish atmosphere in which it was created, and that still clung to it in the autumn of 1913.~~

At the end of the year I received an offer from Leonard Rayne to play in a company that he was organizing for a tour of South Africa. This provided the opportunity I was seeking for further travel and I gladly accepted the offer.

Leonard Rayne had just concluded a season at the Savoy Theatre where he had been presenting H.B. Irving in a costume play, "The Grand Seigneur", but his principal activities were centred in South Africa. There he controlled a circuit of theatres, in which, being an actor-manager as well as a theatrical impresario, he not infrequently played at the head of a company in a round of melodramas, his stock favourite being "A Royal Divorce". He was well suited for the part of Napoleon, and, indeed, there was something of the Napoleonic in his personality.

Touring in South Africa as a minor actor in a theatrical company at the outbreak of the Boer War, he shrewdly sized up the theatrical possibilities that would result from the enormous influx of English troops and collected a small company together, with which he told me he was so successful that by the end of the war he netted £70,000. Being an inveterate gambler, he made and lost several fortunes in the interim.

Personally I consider that the hazards to be found in the

field of theatrical management provide sufficient outlet for the normal gambling instincts of any man, but evidently it did not satisfy Rayne, most of whose hard-won money passed into the hands of the bookmakers for whom, shrewd as he was in theatrical matters, he was apparently an easy mark. He was one of the best known and most popular figures in South Africa and at his premature death some years later, he was widely mourned.

~~Alfred Paumier was the star of the company.~~ He had made several trips to South Africa where he was immensely popular and had a big following. I never saw William Terriss who was before my theatregoing days in London, but I still consider Paumier, with his handsome presence, musical voice, quiet but vital methods and engaging personality, as the best jeune premier I have ever seen in the better class of melodrama of which our repertoire was composed. Nor were his talents limited to the impersonation of handsome heroes, as he showed by a powerful performance of Dr Rylott in "The Speckled Band", in which I was cast for the "~~master detective~~" Sherlock Holmes.

We opened our tour at Capetown in January 1914, and from a subsequent and very extensive acquaintance with every town of importance between the Cape and Pretoria, I am of the opinion that Capetown with its seventeenth century Dutch buildings and the beautiful Government gardens, its magnificent background of Table Mountain and varied scenery, with abundant opportunities for sport and recreation on both land and sea, combined with a temperate and equable climate, render it quite the most desirable place of residence in the Union.

~~There are many who may prefer the gaiety and opulence of Johannesburg or the more exotic charm of Durban, but their attractions are counteracted by their climatic drawbacks. Johannesburg, 6,000 feet above sea level, is subject, particularly in the winter, to sudden and drastic changes of temperature as with the setting of the sun it was plunged in an hour or two from the atmosphere of a fine English summer's day to several degrees below freezing point. Moreover a prolonged residence at such an altitude is a great strain upon the heart and nerves. Durban on the other hand, has an excessively humid semi-tropical climate which although reputedly healthy, is distinctly unpleasant in the summer time.~~

South Africa, as a whole, I should have probably appreciated more had it preceded my tour of the East but, by contrast, it lacked the glamour of Asia with its many and diverse peoples, with their national characteristics, ancient civilizations and traditions, its varied and magnificent scenery. The unending miles of monotonous veldt of which South Africa apart from the coastal areas so largely consists made no appeal to me, though I am aware that the veldt to the South African as the "bush" to the Australian has a fascination for those born and bred in the country, or those to whom it is familiarized by long residence, that can hardly be realized by the casual visitor accustomed to ~~softer outlines and more varied panoramas.~~

After Capetown we played a long and what was, I believe, a record season for a dramatic company in Johannesburg - that

remarkable "show" town which with a population then of only about 100,000 people at that time richly supported three theatres and a large music hall, besides many other places of entertainment.

Lewis Waller was playing with his company at a rival theatre in Johannesburg for a goodly portion of our season and I frequently met that delightful actor and charming man at the Country Club, where I used to make up a foursome at tennis with him, his brother, and Halliwell Hobbes, who was with his company. ~~I don't know whether Waller was deceived by the champagne-like~~ quality of the air at Johannesburg or whether it was his habitual mode of life, but for a man no longer in his first youth he took enormous toll upon the wonderful store of vitality with which nature had endowed him. His usual routine of a rehearsal in the morning, golf all the afternoon followed by several sets of tennis, a hurried dash back in his car to the city for dinner and his performance at night, and then supper with cards or dancing until three or four in the morning, may account for his premature death and regrettable loss to the English stage, which occurred shortly afterwards on his return to England. At any rate, there were even then indications that this strenuous burning of the candle at both ends was affecting him, for when I saw him at a matinee in Johannesburg I was amazed and grieved to find that well-remembered clarion voice had dwindled to little above a hoarse whisper, and only occasionally and with obvious effort did he succeed in bringing forth the trumpet-like notes that used to delight his idolatrous admirers. This probably accounted

for the fact that when I went to Australia, from which country he had just arrived in South Africa, I found that the playgoers there were not so overwhelmingly enthusiastic about his acting as I anticipated in a country where his essentially virile and manly ~~personality should have made an enormous appeal.~~

From Johannesburg we visited Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Kimberley, the latter, despite its great output of wealth in diamonds, a desolating place, only redeemed by the delightful oasis of Alexandersfontein, situated a few miles from the city and linked to it by an electric tramcar that rattled and bumped across the intervening desert at an appalling and breakneck speed. Then Durban, where with its tropical vegetation, its picturesque Zulu rickshaw boys and large Indian population I once more got a sniff of the East.

It was about this time that the company was reorganized, ~~Faunier and others having to leave to fulfil engagements in England,~~ and luckily a vacancy was created which permitted of my wife coming out from England to share the leading women's roles. During this extended tour we paid return visits to many of the larger centres we had already played and also made a very comprehensive circuit of the "dorps", as the smaller towns in South Africa are termed.

August 4th found us paying a second visit to Pretoria where a special edition of the newspaper, in the form of a handbill, came out with the brief but momentous announcement that war had been declared between England and Germany.

What might have been a most exciting experience, had we understood Taal Dutch, befell my wife and me shortly afterwards while we were playing in a small dorp called Weinberg. We were much disturbed and kept awake nearly the whole night by a prolonged and often heated discussion taking place in a room adjoining our bedroom. The voices were plainly audible but as the conversation was carried on in the Boer language, it was quite incomprehensible to us, otherwise we might have been able to give valuable information to the authorities as subsequent disclosures revealed that the occupants of the next room were a group of disgruntled Boers headed by General Beyer, who taking advantage of England's preoccupation in her war with Germany, were discussing the final details of a plot to overthrow the government.

A day or two later, General Beyer and his companions dashing across country in a motor car to raise the flag of rebellion were challenged by a guard, quite ignorant of their identity or purpose, who was merely on the look-out for some I.D.Bs., (Illicit Diamond Buyers). General Beyer thinking their plot had been discovered ignored the challenge and was promptly shot by the guard and so the incipient rebellion collapsed.

An amusing incident I recall that happened during this tour (perhaps not so amusing to my wife at the time) occurred on the first night of the production of a drama when the actress who was playing a fairly important part, although it only consisted of one scene, was suddenly taken ill a few minutes

before the curtain was due to go up. My wife, who was not in the cast of this particular play, and had not attended any of the rehearsals, was hurriedly sent for and asked to go on for the part. She hadn't the faintest idea of the character or what the play was all about and there was no time to tell her, but the man with whom she had her "big scene" was a seasoned actor and said "You leave it to me, I'll tell the story and you just chip in with an occasional remark according to the sense of what I say to you." So the scene opened with a lengthy speech he made appealing to her about something or other, at the conclusion of which he said, "Ah, I know what you will reply to me, you will say so and so and so forth," to which my wife replied, "Yes, indeed, you have guessed my inmost thoughts." More back chat from the actor with further replies of, "No, no, it cannot be", "How true !" "Must it be so ?" etc., etc. till the scene was brought to a triumphant conclusion as witnessed next morning by the local press which singled out my wife's performance for its "admirable restraint" and said the whole scene in which she was concerned was played "with great sincerity and deep feeling". It is just as well perhaps that neither the critics nor the audiences know everything that happens backstage.

~~When we were in Johannesburg, in April, certain members of~~ the company were greatly impressed by the gifts of a woman clairvoyante whom they consulted, and they persuaded me to do likewise. Notwithstanding my experience with Alastor in India, I was somewhat sceptical as to her powers and still more so after

the interview. Amongst other things, the one of greatest importance that she foretold was, "you will not return to England in the near future as you now intend to do but through the machinations of many great people in Europe including Emperors, Kings and Princes, you will go to a vast continent that you have not visited before, and you will not see England again for many years." Having no acquaintance with crowned heads or other great people, nor being able to imagine that the fate of such an insignificant person as myself could possibly come within their orbit, I naturally ridiculed the suggestion and thought no more about it.

~~But here is the sequel.~~ As the end of our engagement with Rayne approached, which actually concluded with a long stock season at Capetown, in November, my wife and I had many discussions as to our future plans. We believed, as I think most people did at that time, that the war would be all over in a few months, and as we had no particular professional prospects in England we finally decided, after much deliberation, to go to Australia where, although it was a terra incognita to us both theatrically and otherwise, my wife had some relatives who had recently settled there, in the neighbourhood of Sydney. There it seemed we might find a temporary home; and a visit to Australia would appease our thirst for further travel.

~~It may be argued that we were subconsciously influenced by the prophecy of the clairvoyante that I should go from South Africa to another "vast continent". But that hardly explains~~

the fact that our decision was primarily the direct result of the war, which was certainly brought about by the machinations of Kings and Princes and other great people, and most certainly I did not see England again for twelve years. However, I will ~~leave it at that, and merely state that~~ we sailed for Australia at the latter end of November, ^{IN} ~~by~~ the "Demosthenes", and)

As the Emden was, at that time, still pursuing her piratical course somewhere in the Indian Ocean, it was a case of lights out and darkened portholes for most of the tedious voyage of three weeks, during which we sighted nothing more formidable than innumerable albatrosses.

Our first view of Australia was the pleasing little port of Albany and then we crossed the Great Australian Bight to Melbourne, where the ship stopped for a day or two en route to Sydney, our port of destination.

Chapter XII.

My knowledge of Australia was that of the average ^{Briton} ~~Britisher~~ - that is to say, precious little. I knew, vaguely, the names of the capital cities and a few other geographical details. I was aware that it had a rather hot climate and was the home of the blackfellow and the kangaroo, ~~etc.~~ I had also gleaned some rather obsolete information about the country from Australian novels such as "Robbery Under Arms", dealing with the bushranger days of an earlier period. Of theatrical conditions my knowledge was, if possible, even more scanty. I had heard, however, that the leading theatrical firm was that of J.C. Williamson Ltd., and armed with this information I called at the Williamson offices on my arrival in Melbourne and asked for an interview with Mr Williamson. I was politely informed that Mr Williamson had been dead for some years !

Although I freely admit that prior to visiting Australia I was unapardonably ignorant regarding ~~our~~ ^{the} great Dominion, yet I found on my return to England that my knowledge had been positively colossal compared with that of many people with whom I came in contact.

Quite a number were under the impression that the state of Tasmania, apparently because it is an island, was an entirely separate country to Australia, while many believed that Australia

and New Zealand^a were under the same government. Some years ago when the late Mr Joseph Lyons, the then Prime Minister of Australia, was in London attending a conference of Dominion Prime Ministers, he and Mrs Lyons paid us a visit at our little cottage in Buckinghamshire and I then told him of my astonishment at not only the ignorance of, but the almost total lack of interest in, anything pertaining to the Dominions on the part of the average man in the street. "My dear Wilkie," he replied, "don't let that surprise you. I am, as you know, having daily conversations with various members of the British Cabinet in connection with our Premiers' conference and other matters and I find their ignorance of everything to do with Australia not a jot less than that of your man in the street. Many of them haven't even an elementary knowledge of my country."

As to theatrical matters there was, with a large number of my profession, an attitude for the most part of slightly contemptuous indifference, as if the standards of production and artistry in the Australian theatre could hardly be worthy of serious consideration. Yet, there is no country in the English speaking world of such recent development with greater theatrical traditions and in which, in spite of its limited population and other handicaps, there was at that time such a high standard of theatrical production.

As several chapters of this book will now deal with my experiences in Australia it will not I trust be out of place, and may be of interest, if I give a short survey of the theatre in Australia, past and present.

The first theatrical performance in Australia took place as far back as 1789, but it was not until October 5th, 1833, that the first theatre was opened in Sydney.

The real history of the Australian theatre commenced ten years later with the advent of George Coppin, an English actor who arrived in 1843, and who besides being an inimitable actor as Paul Pry and other characters of that genre became the first theatrical impresario in Australia. Under his aegis appeared a succession of famous dramatic stars from England and America. He also built a number of theatres and was responsible for several seasons of Grand Opera. He made a number of fortunes and lost them, but he finished his career as the Hon. George Coppin, a member of the Legislative Council of Victoria, respected and honoured by the whole community.

It is not possible to give a complete list of all the great artists who have visited Australia under the banner of Coppin, and later, J.C. Williamson's, or under their own management, but a short summary will furnish some indication of the exceedingly high level of dramatic entertainment demanded by and provided for the Australian public.

The first actor of note to visit Australia was G.V. Brooke, whose name, although he is now beyond the recollection of the oldest Australian playgoers, is always mentioned with loving admiration. He arrived under Coppin's management in 1855, engaged at a salary of £100 per night, and the prices of admission for his first performance, which was "Othello", ranged

five to fifteen shillings - and those were the days when a shilling bought 210. about ten times what it does now!

from ~~5/- to 15/-~~ He remained in Australia for several years and produced over twenty plays of Shakespeare and scores of other classical plays. Barry Sullivan opened in 1862 at the Theatre Royal, Melbourne, of which theatre he later became the lessee for a period of three years. Here he staged a number of magnificent productions, including a presentation of Julius Caesar on which he spent £3,000 - equivalent to about ^{30,}£25,000 to-day, and for this expenditure he had to recoup himself in a town with a population equal to one of the smaller English cathedral cities. Mr and Mrs Charles Kean paid a visit to Australia in 1863; also Charles Dillon. It is interesting to note that this comparatively small town of Melbourne supported two elaborate productions simultaneously of "King John", that Kean and Sullivan staged at rival theatres.

Others who followed in their footsteps were Walter Montgomery, Joseph Jefferson of "Rip Van Winkle" fame, William Creswick, James Anderson, Charles Matthews, Dion Boucicault, the elder, the Italian tragedienne Ristori, George Rignold who brought his production of "Henry V" from Drury Lane and remained in Australia until his death forty years later. During his career, he staged a series of Shakespearean productions in a lavish manner, besides melodrama and pantomimes.

Coming to a later period there was the memorable combination of the younger Dion Boucicault and Robert Brough, who as the Brough-Boucicault Company for many years staged all the earlier plays of Pinero, H.A. Jones, etc. on an artistic level ~~admittedly~~

equal to their West End presentation, while Bland Holt, who held the Australian rights of all the spectacular Drury Lane dramas, was never content, I am told, with a mere replica of their Drury Lane production but always insisted upon going fifty per cent. better in the staging, effects, supernumeraries, *etc. and so on.*

Of this period too there were Sarah Bernhardt, Genevieve Ward, J.L. Toole, Charles Warner, Kyrle Bellew, Wilson Barrett, Janet Achurch, ^{and} Olga Nethersole; ~~etc.~~, while of more recent years the Australian-born Oscar Asche with Lily Brayton, Ethel Irving, Margaret Anglin, H.B. Irving, Lady Forbes Robertson, Cyril Maude and ^{Dame} Marie Tempest have all played lengthy seasons in Australia.

There are many equally famous names that I have omitted but one that cannot be passed over is that of the Sydney born actress Nellie Stewart, who until her death some years ago had been the idol of the Australian public for nearly half a century. She was an actress of singular charm and in her youth of great personal beauty, while her versatility was amazing. There was no branch of theatrical work in which she did not attain distinction.

In her early days she was a prima donna in both Grand and Light Opera; later she achieved equal renown in Shakespeare, modern comedy and costume drama, while during one of her professional visits to England she was the Principal Boy in Drury Lane pantomime under Arthur Collins, who declared she was the best "Boy" the Lane had ever known. But her outstanding popular success, and a part with which her name is indelibly

associated in Australia, was as the heroine in "Sweet Nell of Old Drury", in which, always assured of overflowing houses, she appeared for occasional seasons almost up to the time of her death.

On the many distinguished seasons of Grand Opera, several of them headed by Dame Nellie Melba; the constantly recurring seasons of the ever-green Gilbert and Sullivan operas; the productions of burlesque with Nellie Farren and Fred Leslie and the most recent productions of musical comedy and revue, I do not propose to dwell, but I think I have shown that the Australian stage has a record of achievement which, in the short span of time that it covers, is one of which any country might be proud.

It is true that with the virtual elimination of all serious theatrical competition to the firm of J.C. Williamson, the counter-attraction of mechanical forms of entertainment and the effects of the world-wide economic depression which hit Australia early and hard, there has been a great falling off in theatrical standards, but it is difficult to believe that in a country which possesses such wonderful traditions and probably the most ardent playgoers in the world, the theatre will not recapture its former glories and prestige when conditions become more favourable.

From a purely theatrical standpoint, Australia and New Zealand might be regarded as one. New Zealand having no independent theatrical organization has always been spoon-fed,

as it were, by the Australian managements. As all the plays are first tried out in Australia and only the successful productions are sent over to New Zealand, that little dominion with a population of *little more than two millions,* ~~less than a million and a half~~, with the handicap of its geographical isolation, has been singularly fortunate in its standard of entertainment.

When it is remembered that the combined population of the two countries numbers even to-day only *about twelve* ~~a little over ten~~ millions, and when it is further realized that there is but a handful of cities in which theatrical productions on a big scale can be remunerative, and that those cities are separated by thousands of miles entailing colossal expense in transport, the lavish staging and all round excellence of theatrical production is nothing less than amazing. The maintenance of such high standards was largely accounted for by the fact that in ratio to the population the number of playgoers has always been exceptionally high, and when it has the wherewithal there is no public which spends more freely. The result is that plays have frequently run for three or four or even occasionally for six months in both Melbourne and Sydney, whereas in cities of a corresponding size in England, such as Manchester or Liverpool, a run of a similar number of weeks would be very exceptional. Moreover, although the charges for the highest priced seats were until recently little more than half those ruling in the West End theatres, the proportion who demand those seats is much greater in Australia, and the theatres being on the average

considerably larger, the monetary capacity is in excess of the majority of the theatres in London.

As a concrete example of the playgoing habits of the Australian I might mention that when I was playing a season in Melbourne some thirty ^{FIVE} years ago there were no less than ten legitimate theatres, apart from variety houses, all playing to profitable business.

In attempting to give an impression of theatre audiences in Australia I can only generalize, as they vary in different States and also with the different forms of entertainment. While not in the least degree highbrow in their attitude towards the drama, they have a very quick intelligence, and being a public of practised playgoers they are extremely responsive and most generous in their manifestation of appreciation. Once an actor has established himself in their good graces they are absolutely loyal but, I imagine, there is no country where a world-wide reputation counts for so little. No amount of preliminary "puffing" of a star will materially affect their independent judgment. On the other hand it cannot be claimed that their judgment is infallible, for excellent artists have sometimes failed to receive the recognition in Australia to which their undoubted talents entitled them, while second-rate artists have occasionally achieved a success out of all proportion to their merits. This, however, happens in any country, and the Australian has at least the courage of his own opinions and is not to be beguiled or influenced by the mere fact that an artist

does, or does not, come to his country with a ready-made reputation. On his opening night in Australia an actor can be assured that he will receive a hearty and encouraging welcome, and then it is up to him to "deliver the goods".

Personally, and speaking from a wide experience, I have never met with more attentive, sympathetic and generous audiences, before whom it was always a privilege and a delight to appear, than I found in Australia.

Having thus set the scene, now let me relate some of my experiences in that country, where it was my happy lot to work for sixteen years.

Chapter XIII.

On our arrival at Sydney we went straight to the country to spend a short holiday with my wife's relatives, but it was not long before I went back to Sydney with the very necessary object of finding some work. The only individual in the theatrical world in Australia with whom I had even a slight acquaintance was the old actor, Walter Bentley, whom I had once met in England, and who was now the Secretary of the Actors' Association of Australia. I lost no time in reintroducing myself to him and it was owing to his good offices that my wife and I made our first appearance on the Australian stage, as he kindly suggested that a good means of introducing ourselves to the notice of the theatrical managements would be to appear in a one-act play which was his contribution to the programme of a benefit matinee ~~that was~~ being organized on behalf of George Titheradge, an actor well known in his day both in London and Australia, but who was ^{then} ~~now~~ living in retirement in Sydney.

The only merit of the little play in question lay in the fact that it was extremely topical, the scene being laid in Belgium and the episode of which it treated depicted the invading Germans behaving with barbaric ruthlessness. My chief memory of the play is the vision of Bentley as a German general on active

service in the mess uniform of a British officer which he insisted upon wearing, despite my remonstrances, because as he contended it "looked very nice" ! And Bentley, too, had for some time been a member of Irving's company at the Lyceum where accuracy of detail was almost a religion.

This introduction failed to lead to anything tangible, but a few weeks later I had the good fortune to fall in with George Musgrove who was organizing a company to support Miss Nellie Stewart for a tour of New Zealand, in her ever-popular role of Sweet Nell and a couple of other costume dramas, and I was engaged to play Judge Jeffreys and parts of a like calibre. Clarence Blakiston, whom I had seen years before in London as Sheerluck Jones in a clever burlesque of ^{Conan Doyle's famous creation,} ~~Sherlock Holmes~~, had been specially brought out from England and was playing Charles II, and the other leading roles.

George Musgrove in his earlier days of management had been a partner in the firm of J.C. Williamson Ltd. when it traded under the title of Williamson, Garner and Musgrove, but he was not the type of man to pull in double or triple harness for long, as besides being extremely brusque, not to say surly in his manner, he was exceedingly obstinate and independent in his views. I am inclined to think that his bark was worse than his bite, for under a somewhat gruff exterior I personally found him to be kind-hearted and considerate. I think, however, he was very friendly disposed to me from the outset from the fact that as he

knew nothing of my work, I refused to have my contract ratified until I had rehearsed the parts to his satisfaction.

Whatever his failings may have been as a man, one could not but admire him as a manager, for his productions were as near perfection as artistic taste and a complete disregard of expense could make them.

This latter propensity had several times brought him to the verge of ruin with his lavish, not to say extravagant productions of Grand Opera and Shakespeare. This, despite the fact that he had cleared over £70,000 with his production of "The Belle of New York" at the Shaftesbury Theatre in London, and that he had an unfailing attraction in Miss Nellie Stewart who, ~~as I previously stated,~~ was idolized by the Australian public.

A good story which exemplifies his character - both his obstinacy as a man and his artistic soul as a manager - and also explains the reason for his occasional financial difficulties, is told of him in connection with a production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne, in the usual profuse Musgrove manner, with a specially imported cast, most elaborate scenery and an enormous orchestra. Although, by all accounts, a really beautiful and artistic production, it utterly failed to attract the public. One night after it had been playing to most meagre audiences, Musgrove leaning over the back of the dress circle, of which he was almost the sole occupant, and watching with loving interest the progress of the play, was

approached by a friend who, concerned at the enormous financial loss Musgrove was incurring, remonstrated with him, saying, "Why don't you take it off, George, can't you see the public don't like it?" To which Musgrove most admirably replied, "I don't care what the public like, I like it!" In the tour for which I was engaged everything conformed to Musgrove's usual high standard. It was an excellent company, the plays were splendidly staged, the entire orchestra was travelled and even the super-numeraries, in addition to a large stage staff.

Our itinerary included a number of small towns where we played for one or two nights, but even in these places the plays were always presented in exactly the same manner as in the large centres. This was rendered possible by the fact that in New Zealand even towns with a population of only 10 to 15,000 had theatres superior to half those of London, being well-equipped, with large auditoriums and stages with facilities and accommodation for a Drury Lane production.

For this state of affairs, I understand, the theatrical profession have to thank Wilson Barrett who, when he toured New Zealand, lost no opportunity at public receptions and through the medium of the press in advocating municipal theatres as an essential adjunct to the cultural and social life of the community. Fortunately his words were hearkened to and resulted in an orgy of theatre building, so that practically every town in New Zealand outside the four large cities (where the theatres were controlled by the Williamson and Fuller firms) had their

municipal theatres built on the spacious lines I have indicated. But alas ! with the invasion of the films into the entertainment world the majority of them have been diverted from their original purpose and are now leased to the picture combines. Fortunately, with the wise proviso in some cases, that certain nights in the week are to be available for theatrical companies when required.

We did big business throughout the tour, Nellie Stewart being as popular in New Zealand as in Australia. She was certainly a most accomplished and gifted actress with great personal charm though, to me, her methods appeared to be rather artificial; but then as both the plays and the characters she was impersonating were somewhat artificial, it would be perhaps unfair to criticize her on that score, and I am told she could adopt a genuinely naturalistic method when acting in modern plays.

This, my first visit to New Zealand, a country which I later visited with my own company some half a dozen times and in which, in the aggregate, I spent about four years was altogether a delightful experience, and successive visits only served to strengthen the affection for the country and its people which I felt on my first acquaintance.

Had it not already been named by a Dutchman after his own country, (which it is totally unlike in every respect), there is no country in the world ~~it would be~~ more fitting to christened New England, or alternatively New Britain; for while the scenery possesses unique features in its volcanic and thermal regions, it is perhaps more reminiscent of Scotland than England

with its mountains, lakes and coastal features. Climatically, however, it comes nearer to England, with a good and evenly distributed rainfall, but the addition of a much higher average of sunshine and, except in the uplands, a milder winter.

The country has been settled too recently for its people to have developed any marked divergence from their parent stock and, in any case, with a climate so closely approximating to that of England, the slow but gradual change in at least the superficial characteristics of a people which inevitably follows their transference to another clime will probably be ^{more} noticeable later in New Zealand than in any of the other Dominions.

The native Maoris are a most interesting people with many romantic legends and traditions. They have freely intermarried with the British people, and New Zealand is the only country in the Empire where such unions do not appear to entail loss of prestige or social standing to ^{either} ~~the white~~ partner. This is remarkable, when it is remembered that the Maoris are only a generation or two removed from savagery, in which state they were most bloodthirsty and ferocious, though withal chivalrous fighters, despite the ~~revolting~~ habit of devouring their enemies. But the modern educated Maori is a clever and cultured gentleman, while as an orator he is unsurpassed. Having ^{had} no written language, ^{until the advent of the white settlers,} the Maoris have had to rely upon oral records for the preservation of their laws, history and legends, and as speech-making plays an important part in all their ceremonies, they have developed into a race of trained and gifted orators. One has

only to visit the House of Parliament in Wellington and listen to one of the Maori representatives and compare his fluent speech, beautiful phrasing, and (if the occasion warrants it) poetic imagery, enhanced by its delivery in a musical and well-modulated voice, to the frequently halting expression of stereotyped platitudes indulged in by his brother, Pakeha, (white man), to realize how superior he is, in this respect at least, to the often inarticulate Anglo-Saxon.

The uneducated Maori is a simple, ingenuous soul, but by no means lacking in a certain childish cunning. As exemplifying this trait in his character, here is a story told me by my friend Tom Seddon, the son of New Zealand's great prime minister, Sir Richard Seddon.

One wet and stormy night a big, strapping Maori walked into a police station in a little township on the west coast of the South Island, where the constable on duty was comfortably roasting himself over the fire. In reply to his query as to the Maori's business, the latter replied, "Pakeha in my whare (native hut) - annoying my wife - won't go - you come - turn him out." In response to further enquiry he stated that his dwelling was some miles away in the bush. The constable was naturally not anxious to leave the comfort of his fire and tramp along a rough bush track for several miles in the pouring rain, but the Maori was insistent and finally he donned his waterproof coat and set out with him. By the time he arrived at the Maori's hut he was thoroughly fed up with the whole business, and was

further disgusted when he entered the whare to find instead of the ferocious ruffian he had been led to expect, a little undersized white man sitting by the fire with the Maori's wife. However, without further ado, and deaf to the remonstrances of the intruder who expostulated violently, he seized him by the scruff of the neck and flung him into the night with a warning not to return or he would take him back to the gaol to be dealt with by the local magistrate.

Having thus disposed of him he vented his wrath upon the Maori. "What do you mean, you great hulking coward, by bringing me six miles to throw out that miserable specimen? You are surely big enough to protect your wife. Why didn't you throw him out yourself?"

To which this simple child of nature replied, "Oh no! - Me no touch him - him bailiff!"

There is a considerable amount of rivalry and jealousy existing between the North and South Islands, and to a lesser extent between the four centres of Wellington, Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin. The South Island People resent amongst other things that not only is the seat of government in the North Island but also the two official residences of the Governor-General, in Wellington and Auckland respectively. The four large cities besides having distinctive and beautiful scenic settings have each a marked individuality; perhaps most so in the case of Christchurch, which is the most emphatically English, with something of the atmosphere of one of our cathedral cities,

and also Dunedin, which is more Scottish than Scotland, and as befits its character largely finances the rest of New Zealand, although the smallest of the four towns in point of size.

Our tour of New Zealand lasted about three or four months, when we returned to Australia to play a three weeks' season in Adelaide, where the company was disbanded. It was not long before I was engaged by the J.C. Williamson firm for a production in Sydney of one of the many spy plays with which the stage was deluged at the time. This particular concoction was an American play called "Inside the Lines", which I believe had a long run in London, but was not particularly successful in Australia, and after a short season in Sydney followed by visits to Brisbane, Adelaide and Western Australia the piece was shelved.

My wife had meanwhile been playing the leading roles in a season of modern comedies in Brisbane and subsequently had joined the "Inside the Lines" Company, so that with the termination of this tour we were both - to use the professional expression - resting. In this unhappy state we remained for several months, and with our very meagre financial resources rapidly diminishing to zero we began to wonder if Australia was in truth the theatrical Eldorado we had been led to believe.

However, when our fortunes had reached their lowest ebb I had the good luck to come in contact with a well-known theatrical manager, Mr George Marlow. Marlow was the lessee of important theatres in Sydney and Melbourne, in conjunction with the firm of Ben and John Fuller, and had also made a considerable fortune with

the production of ^{popular melodrama.} ~~Melvillean drama~~ and plays of a like calibre. I had written to him enclosing one or two circulars of my English and Eastern Shakespearian tours, but merely as a means of introduction and with no thought of anything beyond the possibility of an engagement in one of his drama companies, the idea of which was far from congenial but for which, placed as we were, I should have been nevertheless grateful.

My delight can therefore be imagined when he made an appointment and suggested organizing a Shakespearian company to be headed by my wife and myself, to open the following month (January 1916) in Melbourne.

Apart from the generous terms proposed by Marlow, my wife and I were delighted at the prospect of getting back to our beloved Shakespeare and also the opportunity of showing our mettle in Australia in a medium to which we were accustomed.

It is hardly necessary to state that we jumped at the offer and I shall be ever grateful to Marlow, to whom apart from our past record we were an unknown quantity, for giving us the opening which proved to be the introduction to a new career in theatrical management and the turning point in our fortunes.

Chapter XIV.

Except for the visits of H.B. Irving, Oscar Asche, Wilson Barrett and a few other actor-managers who had between them produced about seven or eight of the plays of Shakespeare there had been no performances of these plays upon the Australian stage for upwards of twenty years when I set out to organize a company on behalf of George Marlow. The visiting stars had all been supported by their own companies and there had been no opportunity therefore for the present generation of resident Australian actors to acquire experience in the acting of Shakespeare. This, is, or should be, a highly specialized branch of the actor's art; The ability to speak blank verse, to wear the costumes of remote ages as if to the manner born, and the capacity to identify himself with the period, is only gained by long and arduous practice and even then only if the actor possesses the necessary emotional and temperamental equipment.

The percentage of those who adopt the stage as a calling and possess the intrinsic qualities, irrespective of training, that go to the making of a Shakespearean player is very small indeed.

My difficulties can therefore be imagined in recruiting a Shakespearean Company in Australia, where there had been no

local Shakespearean productions since the far off days of George Rignold and Alfred Dampier.

It is true that Marlow gave me an absolutely free hand (always provided that the salary list did not exceed a stated and not excessive figure), but even so, it was quite impossible in the circumstances to select the material I would have desired. ~~However I managed~~ to get together a good working company and as ^{Insertion} I found the Australian actor very keen, adaptable and intelligent, I managed by dint of strenuous rehearsals to assemble a presentable company for our opening night in "The Merchant of Venice".

Marlow had also given me carte blanche regarding the production, and the play was more than adequately staged; but it was, I think, an error of judgement to play to the low prices of admission which had always been Marlow's successful policy with regard to melodrama, and which he now continued for my Shakespearean season. Had my wife and I been stars well-known to the Australian public the low prices would doubtless have been appreciated, but as we were quite unknown to the Melbourne audiences, and as with theatrical fare so with other commodities, people are inclined to gauge the value of an article with which they are not acquainted by the price demanded, the policy of offering Shakespearean entertainment at about half the price it had been the custom to charge for the productions of Irving, Asche and others was undoubtedly prejudicial to the opening of our season. The result was that the house was less than half

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However, I was fortunate in two or three actors with a Shakespearean background including the veteran P.V. Scully who served me loyally for the entire period of my 15 years of management in Australia. Then there was Lorna Forbes, daughter of a gifted theatrical family, herself blessed with a beautiful speaking voice and attractive personality who became a great favourite with the Australian public also remaining in my company, excepting a brief interlude, for the full 15 years. Changes in the personnel of my company were very infrequent, most of them working for me for many years, indeed it would otherwise have been quite impacticable to maintain the enormous repertoire I gradually accumulated. Only with a devoted and more or less permanent company would it have been possible some years aler in Melbourne during a 4 weeks season to change my programme nightly presenting no less than 24 different Shakespearean plays without a hitch. Quite a feat in itself I maintain.

One way and another *I MANAGED* ----

filled on our first night; and although we had a most enthusiastic reception and a favourable press, it took some weeks to convince the playgoing public as a whole, that Shakespeare at melodrama prices could be worth their patronage.

We played "The Merchant of Venice" for a fortnight to indifferent houses and then "Othello" for another couple of weeks with little better fortune; but "Twelfth Night" which followed caught the popular taste and also by that time we had made our reputation, and so the business increased with a bound and continued on a most satisfactory level with productions of "Hamlet", "Romeo and Juliet" and "As you Like It".

My arrangement with Marlow had been for an experimental season of four weeks which had been extended to eleven weeks. This, as indicative of our success, was gratifying enough in itself, but my wife and I had the further satisfaction of knowing that we had firmly established ourselves in the good graces of the Melbourne public besides having made a host of personal friends, and we could look forward with confidence to repeating the process through the Commonwealth. Although our hopes were more than justified and I should be loth to make invidious comparisons between the various States and cities of Australia, in all of which we were the recipients of universal kindness and a most generous welcome, yet I have to confess there is no place in Australia that I regard with quite the same degree of affection

as Melbourne, where we always returned with the feeling that we were "going home".

Melbourne, while lacking the natural advantages of Sydney, is a handsome city with fine broad streets, many beautiful parks and public gardens, and on the whole a temperate and healthy climate, though subject to sudden falls of temperature especially in the summer, when with a change of wind from north to south the thermometer will drop forty to fifty degrees in an hour or two. When the temperature has been well over the hundred mark, these changes, though sudden, are none the less welcome.

The Princess Theatre where we played for this and ^{several} ~~many~~ following seasons, built by George Musgrove many years ago, is in my opinion, still the most perfect theatre in Australia. With a seating capacity of about 1,800 and a fine stage, it is so excellently proportioned that it is suitable for productions of grand opera, Shakespeare or the most intimate of modern comedies. And in what other country are to be found such delightful and generous audiences as in Melbourne, or in Australia as a whole? Swift in their intelligent response and intensely sympathetic to the aims and ideals of both manager and actor, their appreciation of one's efforts was manifested by the most heartening applause as well as by a wealth of floral tributes to the ladies of the company. On the opening and close of a season or any special occasion these tributes were bestowed in such numbers that at the fall of the curtain the stage had the appearance of a flower

garden; while the hospitality and social kindnesses showered upon one becomes positively embarrassing when combined with the exigencies of the strenuous life entailed in the production of Shakespeare.

For this auspicious start in Shakespearean management in Australia we were greatly indebted to their Excellencies Sir Munro and Lady Ferguson, (later Lord and Lady Novar) who by their presence at our performances, and in many other ways, assisted in making our season a success. Lady Ferguson was connected with the Sheridan family and was naturally very interested when in a subsequent season we produced two of her famous kinsman's brilliant comedies, "The School for Scandal" and "The Rivals". She had a great admiration for my wife's acting and paid her a magnificent compliment one day when she said to me, "Miss Hunter-Watts' performance of Ophelia is the most beautiful thing I have seen in Australia."

Under the patronage of their Excellencies we gave a pastoral performance of "As You Like It" in the beautiful grounds of the Federal Government House during the last week of our season, on behalf of the French Red Cross. If not the first performance of its kind in Melbourne, it was a sufficient novelty to arouse great interest, and was instrumental in raising a large sum for its objective.

The only jarring note in connection with this happy season arose from the idiosyncrasies of an actor who was playing the

King in Hamlet. This actor, apart from always being in a chronic state of pecuniary embarrassment, had a rooted and notorious objection to paying his debts even when, as rarely happened, he was temporarily possessed of funds. On taking up the evening paper one day during the run of Hamlet I was astonished to see a heading in large type "King of Denmark sued for Laundry Bill". My astonishment that His Majesty should be in such financial straits quickly gave way to horror when I discovered the paragraph alluded not to the reigning monarch, but to the aforesaid actor who was appearing nightly as King Claudius at the Princess Theatre ! This was the sort of publicity one could well dispense with.

A few nights at Ballarat followed upon Melbourne, en route for a three weeks' season at Adelaide. Ballarat, the scene of the great gold rush in 1851, now mainly an agricultural centre, with its magnificent main avenue of Sturt Street, its beautiful large lake and public gardens, was laid out on generous lines by its early pioneers.

Adelaide too was skilfully planned with an eye to its future development. The town proper, a mile square, is surrounded by park lands beyond which extend the suburbs and private residences of Adelaide between the foot of the Mount Lofty ranges on the one side and the sea on the other.

One of my pleasantest memories of this visit to Adelaide was my first meeting with my friend, the late Sir Josiah Symon,

who, besides being one of the most eminent legal figures in Australia, in which capacity he took a prominent part in the drafting of the Constitution of the Commonwealth, was also an ardent student of Shakespeare and Burns and the author of several scholarly and delightfully written books on certain aspects of his favourite authors. In the grounds of his beautiful and picturesque home on the slopes of Mount Lofty, where it was my privilege to visit him on many occasions, he had a Shakespearean garden containing most of the flowers and plants mentioned by Shakespeare in his plays. With such an enthusiast it is needless to state that my efforts in staging Shakespeare in Australia met with great sympathy, and I was much indebted to Sir Josiah for his unfailing interest and encouragement in my enterprise.

At Easter, the great agricultural show takes place at Sydney; it lasts for about a fortnight and is held on a gigantic scale. For this event the city is inundated with countless visitors from every part of Australia, and as consequently they provide a rich harvest for all public entertainments Marlow had arranged for me to open a season there at Easter in his theatre, the Grand Opera House, which had a seating capacity of 2,000 and the largest stage of any theatre in Australia.

Our season was preceded by a public reception tendered to my wife and myself. The Lord Mayor, the principal speaker, although I knew he was famed for his eloquence, made a speech that held me spellbound by its beautiful phrasing and imagery and

made me the more conscious by contrast of my own halting and inadequate response. Much of his speech had a reminiscent ring and I felt my eclipse less when, on referring to Ingersoll's masterly essay on Shakespeare, I discovered he had lifted the most telling passages en bloc and incorporated them in his speech. As a feat of memory it was deserving of admiration and, after all, everything that can be said in praise of Shakespeare has been said, and he could not have gone to a better source for his purpose.

At Sydney I added Richard III to my repertoire. For this production I have to acknowledge with some compunction ^{that} I made use of the Colley Cibber version. Following in the footsteps of Barry Sullivan and the Tearles (Osmond and Edmund) who had familiarized the audiences in the north of England with the Cibber text, I had been advised to make use of it when I first staged it in my early managerial days, and not having the necessary leisure during my busy Sydney season to study the correct Shakespearean text, I again fell back upon Cibber. When, ~~a few years later,~~ ^{a few years later,} I produced Shakespeare's Richard I found it the most difficult study I ^{had} ever tackled in my professional experience; for ~~Cibber has interjected lines and passages of his own and altered numberless words and phrases, and as his version from frequent repetition was much more familiar to me than that of Shakespeare.~~ ^{Cibber's version - which from frequent repetition was much more familiar to me than that of Shakespeare - was full of interjected lines and passages of his own, and numberless altered words and phrases; and} ~~version from frequent repetition was much more familiar to me than that of Shakespeare.~~ I had always to use the utmost concentration, especially in the more tense and dramatic moments of the

character, lest I should find myself reverting to the Cibberian text.

As perhaps the only living actor who has played both versions of Richard III hundreds of times, let me state, what I know is rank heresy, and will be regarded by all good Shakespeareans as little short of blasphemy, that I found the Cibber hotch-potch with all its crudities a more compact and better stage play than the wordy and diffuse play as written by Shakespeare. In confirmation of my opinion based upon personal experience, I would point out that no actors of recent years have ever achieved the fame that Edmund Kean, G.F. Cooke, Barry Sullivan and others did as Richard III, and that whereas Cibber's version was one of the most popular plays on the English stage, Shakespeare's is only occasionally produced. Of course, I realize the obvious reply to my arguments is, that tastes have changed in the matter of plays and in any case we haven't any Keans to-day.

The tercentenary of Shakespeare's death occurring while I was at the Grand Opera House, I commemorated the event with a gala performance, the proceeds of which were devoted to charity. For this occasion I gave several scenes selected from my repertoire and I also had the assistance of a number of well-known actors resident in Sydney including the veteran actor, William Holman, a charming and cultured gentleman, the father of Mr. ^{.....} Holman, for some time premier of ^{New South} ~~N.~~ S. Wales. He played Jaques in a scene from "As You Like It", while another veteran, ~~in~~ Walter Bentley

played the title-role from the third act of "Othello" - a performance which he assured me was entirely modelled on that of Salvini, whom he had seen in the part many times at Drury Lane - "The greatest Othello, the wurrld has ever seen, my boy !"

It was inevitable that the first Shakespearean season, *to be* staged by a local as against a visiting company for many years should call forth a crop of stories connected with my predecessors, and more particularly of George Rignold who, besides being a very fine actor, appears to have been an extraordinary personality.

After playing Henry V at Drury Lane and touring in that character throughout the U.S.A. with great success, he visited Australia where he remained for the rest of his life. For a long time he was the lessee of Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney, where during an uninterrupted run of seven years he staged a number of magnificent Shakespearean productions, interspersed with melodramas and an annual Christmas pantomime. He was a regal figure of a man; every inch a King as Henry V, and was affectionately known to the public as "Handsome George". Sydney was a much smaller community in those days and by reason of his continuously appearing before them *George Rignold* he was on exceedingly familiar terms with his audiences. When the Bank failures occurred in the "nineties" and the public were feeling the financial stringency he decided to lower his prices to meet the times. The new scale of prices which reduced the gallery from the usual shilling to sixpence was inaugurated on a Saturday night when Rignold was playing

Othello. Some turbulent spirits in the gods who had been continually interrupting the play became particularly restive and noisy during the big third act. Any other actor but "Handsome George" might have dropped the curtain and then made an appeal to the disturbing element for better behaviour. Not so, Rignold. He merely broke off in the middle of a speech, walked down to the footlights, pointed to the gallery with a menacing forefinger, and said - "You - Monday night - a bob!", calmly walked back, took up his former position and resumed his speech where he had left off.

In a beautiful and secluded situation on the shores of Middle Harbour - an offshoot of Sydney Harbour - Rignold had bought about five acres of ground on which he had built himself a small stone house. A man of iron physique and one that loved to hear the chimes at midnight, he would think nothing, after playing a heavy role and spending the night with some kindred spirits, of taking the ferry over to the north shore at three or four a.m., walking through the bush for several miles and then rowing himself across Middle Harbour to his rural retreat. It was while here, at Braybrooke, living in retirement in receipt of a pension from a theatrical fund in England to which he has been a life-long subscriber, that a certain actor who happened to be on the committee of this particular fund visited Australia. In these circumstances Rignold thought it would be a gracious act to invite him to his home and show him some hospitality. He

accordingly invited him to spend a day at Braybrooke and did him exceedingly well with a slap-up lunch and wine of the best. His ungrateful guest promptly reported to headquarters that Rignold was living a life of luxurious ease on his "estate" near Sydney and apparently possessed of ample funds, with the result that poor Rignold's pension or allowance was docked; at least so the tale goes. But there are countless stories told of Rignold. This one, however, I feel has a moral to it.

Our season in Sydney, though not, for a variety of reasons, very successful financially, was sufficiently so to warrant our embarking upon a tour of New Zealand. But here again we suffered from the continued policy of cheap prices. The public held aloof for the commencement of the season in every town while on our last nights we were turning hundreds away. Nevertheless, the tour, which lasted about four months, was very successful, particularly so in the South Island, which for some reason or other, with a much smaller population, both on this and all my subsequent tours with Shakespeare, gave me nearly double the support of the North Island.

Courts of Justice where the real drama of life with all its attributes of tragedy, comedy and melodrama is unfolded, have always had for me, as for many members of my profession, a great fascination, and I think it was on this tour of New Zealand that happening to drop into the Police Court at a small town in the

North Island to while away an hour, I heard a witness give a reply which in its supreme inadequacy struck me as being the height of ludicrousness.

It was a case of a sordid fracas between a man and a woman and the witness repeated in court a string of the most obscene, blasphemous and abusive oaths which he had overheard the man direct at the woman. The language was such that even the hardened police officials blanched and shuddered. When the witness had concluded, the magistrate asked him "Well, what was your attitude; what did you think when you heard the prisoner address the woman in this revolting manner?" "Well, sir," hesitatingly replied the witness, "I thought he was rather lacking in tact!"

From New Zealand we returned to Melbourne where a great welcome awaited us, opening with "The Taming of the Shrew" at the beginning of November in Cup Week, the great social and popular event of the year in Melbourne. Here we remained for four months playing right through the Australian summer and producing in addition to Shakespeare, "The Bells" and several eighteenth century comedies.

On the first night of "The Rivals" there occurred a most dreadful contretemps and the performance was only saved from disaster by the good-nature of the Melbourne public and the courage and resource of a young actress. We had a crowded and fashionable audience including Her Excellency, Lady Helen Munro

Ferguson, who always had a box reserved for our first nights, and everything augured a most successful premiere. To my horror and disgust, however, on making my first entrance as Sir Anthony Absolute with Mrs Malaprop I discovered that the woman playing this role, a most able and experienced actress whom I had specially engaged for the part, was hopelessly intoxicated. After speaking all her lines in addition to my own in the short scene between us, I realized it would be quite impossible to allow her to continue in such a long and intricate part. Mrs Malaprop is guilty of many solecisms of speech but she is never tongue-tied. A perverted volubility is her main characteristic. At the conclusion of the first act (in which Mrs Malaprop fortunately had not to make any further appearance,) while racking my brains for a way out of this horrible dilemma, Marie Ney who had but recently joined my company and was playing the comparatively small part of Lucy, now stepped forward and volunteered to read Mrs Malaprop for the remainder of the play. I most gratefully accepted her offer and after apologizing to the audience for the unfortunate indisposition (God save the mark !) of the inebriated one and craving their indulgence for Miss Ney, the latter read the part with an aplomb and intelligence which would have taxed the resource and confidence of a far more experienced actress. Her efforts were most sympathetically received and what might have been a veritable fiasco had a most happy conclusion.

Marie Ney remained in my company for several years, gradually playing more important and eventually leading parts, and even in those earlier days of her stage career manifested that charm, ability and eager enthusiasm in her work; all those qualities which in their riper fulfilment won for her the distinguished position that she was to occupy later on the London stage.

Chapter XV.

Despite the fact that our Melbourne season was played through an exceptionally hot summer and that we had to contend with other adverse factors, such as Australia's first and only experiment in daylight saving, and industrial unemployment consequent upon a coal strike, we had held our own financially after paying off the cost of many new productions. But this was not enough to satisfy the comparatively young and very ambitious Fuller firm, who had now taken over Marlow's interests, and at this juncture I found myself at the dividing of the ways.

While touring in New Zealand I had seen the reports in the Australian press of a production of Walter Howard's drama "The Story of the Rosary", by J.C. Williamson's, at the Theatre Royal, Melbourne. This piece, although played by a strong cast headed by Frank Harvey and Madge Fabian, had proved a total failure and only ran for a week or so. Knowing that the Fullers were on the look out for good plays I had written to them strongly advising them, if possible, to secure the rights of "The Story of the Rosary" from Williamson's as I was familiar with the play and was convinced it could be successfully reproduced under their management. I might have hesitated to give this advice had I foreseen the sequel. The Fullers having come to an arrangement

with Williamson's regarding "The Story of the Rosary" now suggested at the end of my Melbourne season that as the classical drama was not proving particularly successful from the financial end, and that as I had such faith in the possibilities of the play, I should produce it myself. Not being in a position to continue the Shakespearean enterprise at my own risk and loth as I was to give it up, I had no alternative but to accept the proposition, in which they most generously endorsed my belief in the play by giving me an equal partnership in the profits without any responsibility for problematical losses.

We produced "The Story of the Rosary" at the Grand Opera House, Sydney, where it ran for just over ten weeks and then took it to Melbourne, where it had previously failed, and played it to big business for nine weeks. The success of this play led to the Fullers arranging with the Williamson firm for me to produce another play of Walter Howard's, "Seven Days' Leave". This production proved equally successful and with these two plays I made a prolonged tour of Australia and New Zealand terminating at Perth (West Australia) with a three months' season, in which in addition to Walter Howard's two dramas I once more produced several Shakespearean plays.

The success of this season was unfortunately marred by my succumbing to the infantile complaint of chicken-pox and as I had ^{no understudy} neither then nor at any other time, ~~an understudy~~, the theatre had to be temporarily closed. This was in November,

1918, and as I lay in bed at the Esplanade hotel on the Swan River I listened to the cheering mobs and saw the glow of the bonfires through my window in celebration of the signing of the Armistice.

With the conclusion of the Perth season my quasi-partnership with the Fullers ended, and I then entered into an arrangement with J.C. Williamson's to run a stock season at the Theatre Royal, Sydney. The policy was a weekly change of programme of drama and occasional productions of classical plays, but I was not altogether sorry when the season was brought to an abrupt conclusion at the end of six weeks owing to the influenza epidemic which swept through Australia in the early part of 1919 and necessitated the closing of all theatres. A long and heavy part to study every week, ^{together} with the cares of production, was a sufficiently arduous life and one that I should not have cared to continue indefinitely, but when in addition to these labours my cast was being continuously changed as one actor after another was stricken by the prevailing epidemic, the conditions became impossible. As an example of the difficulties with which I had to contend: in a revival of "The School for Scandal", opening with a matinee, I had three different actors playing Charles Surface in two days !

With the closure of the theatres in Sydney there was nothing to be done professionally, so my wife and I seized the opportunity of taking a well-earned, and indeed the first real holiday we had

had during our five years in Australia. This we spent at Newport, a small watering place close to Sydney^T where, free from the influenza germ-laden city, we gave ourselves up to the delights of bathing in the surf of the Pacific Ocean or boated, fished and picnicked on one of the inlets of the beautiful Hawkesbury river. My time was also occupied in reading some of the accumulation of manuscripts ^{by} of embryo playwrights with which I was continuously inundated, and I now had ample leisure for this ungrateful and tedious task. As during my association with the Fuller firm, ^{mr} Sir (^{later Sir} ~~then Mr~~) Benjamin Fuller had also constituted me his unofficial play-reader, it has been my misfortune to wade through an interminable mass of what, for the most part, can only be described as rubbish. Even writers possessed of genuine literary ability, when they turn their pens to playwriting rarely deem it necessary to acquire even the most elementary knowledge of the technique of the theatre. Five-act dramas that would act less than half an hour, and plays with forty⁷five scenes, every one of which would require a Drury Lane setting, were frequent specimens of the dramatist's art that were submitted to me. A frank criticism was always requested by the author and invariably resented. His egotism was boundless. One of this breed inveigled me into his study and expatiated for a solid hour upon his measureless admiration for Pinero whom he considered was beyond question the greatest master of playwriting in the English-speaking world. He then proceeded to inform me

that of all Pinero's masterpieces "Iris" was undoubtedly the finest. Having further discoursed upon this theme at considerable length he opened a drawer in his desk and reverently drew forth a manuscript saying, "Now, Mr Wilkie, here is a play I have written which when you have read I am sure you will agree is a much finer play than 'Iris' !!!" It wasn't !

Australia has, of course, produced several very able playwrights; but they ^{HAVE BEEN} ~~are~~ greatly handicapped by the fact that in Australia itself they ^{HAD} ~~have~~ little or no market for their work, as managers are perhaps naturally inclined to favour plays that are approved successes and have the hallmark of London or New York, rather than gamble on the untried efforts of local dramatists.

~~Moreover, Australian dramatists, generally speaking, are,~~ ^{Emulsion} in my humble opinion, too much concerned with creating an atmosphere instead of allowing the atmosphere to develop itself naturally from the theme and characters of the play. And, after all, with over three-fifths of the population of the Commonwealth dwelling in large cities, there is no necessity for Australian playwrights to concentrate so largely upon the atmosphere of the bush, redolent of blue gums and "cocky farmers". Australia has moved considerably since the days of "Robbery Under Arms" and ~~Ned Kelly~~.

It is but rarely that a member of my profession can enjoy a genuine holiday, in the fullest sense of the term, for if an actor he is probably worried about, if not actually endeavouring

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Conditions have greatly improved in recent years, however, with ~~the~~
the founding of what is practically a National Theatre under
the title of The Elizabethan Theatre Trust which offers every
encouragement to Australian playwrights, some of whose local
productions having been transferred to the London stage, one
at least, with conspicuous success.

to obtain, his next engagement, and, if a manager, he is usually concerned with plans for his next campaign. The latter was my case at Newport, for between bouts of surfing and playreading I was busily engaged in making my arrangements for a tour of New Zealand which I had decided to undertake on my own responsibility, once more assuming the role of an independent actor-manager. As the outfit for a Shakespearean repertoire would have required a considerably larger capital than I could raise, and as I intended to remain in New Zealand for a long period, I resolved to rely upon a very mixed bag, comprising as it did old stagers such as "The Silver King", "Trilby", "Camille" etc., and classical comedy with "The School for Scandal" and "She Stoops to Conquer", to which were added later my friend H.F. Maltby's comedies "The Rotters" and "A Temporary Gentleman", also "Hindle Wakes" and "The Luck of the Navy".

With this programme I toured the length and breadth of both islands of New Zealand for nearly a year, playing repeated seasons in the large centres and visiting even the smallest towns, many of which could be accounted as little more than villages, but which were capable of showing returns in one night that would have compared favourably with a week's receipts in a fair sized town in England in those days.

The conditions of transport in 1919 were still very primitive in certain areas of New Zealand, and in order to reach the West Coast of the South Island we had to travel by old-fashioned stage

coaches, drawn by four horses, which linked up the two railheads at each side of the Otira Gorge, now joined by a tunnel under the mountains over five miles long. Otira, by the way, is the centre of the wild and rugged country described by Samuel Butler in his satire on modern life and thought, Erewhon.

Our outward journey through the Gorge was made in a heavy snowstorm; and the coaches pounded up the hills and galloped down the slopes of the road that twisted its way through the mountains in a manner which, while it did credit to the expertness of the Jehus, was somewhat nerve-racking to passengers unused to this mode of travel.

Years ago the west coast, when alluvial gold deposits were first discovered there, supported a huge population, but the boom only lasted about seven or eight years, and although coal-mining and agriculture have taken the place of gold washing, all the towns that sprang up in a night have shrunk to a tithe of their former size and an air of decay permeates the whole district. The West Coast, however, will always be famous from the fact that the little town of Kumara gave political birth to the great Dick Seddon who represented the constituency in the New Zealand parliament and became the greatest Prime Minister the Dominion has known, and who was still held in affectionate remembrance by the older generation of New Zealanders.

Like all ex-mining communities the people are intelligent and extraordinarily hospitable, and we spent a very pleasant and

successful week in Greymouth, the metropolis of the West Coast. Thence we visited the little town of Reefton for a night and then travelled by motor coach through the magnificent Buller Gorge along a road cut out of the solid rock, high above the river, to the coal-mining centre of Westport.

With my company I safely arrived in Westport about midday, confidently anticipating that the slower moving motor lorry conveying the scenery and wardrobe ~~required~~ for our two nights' season would arrive about a couple of hours later, but unfortunately it met with engine trouble and could only proceed, and that spasmodically, at about four miles an hour. This I learned by a telephone message from the driver en route.

After gazing all the late afternoon down the long vista of Westport's one street in the vain hope of seeing the approach of the vehicle in the distance, until it was but a few minutes to eight o'clock, at which time our performance was due to commence, I decided to throw myself upon the mercy of the Westportians, who for this rare visit of a theatrical company had crowded every corner of the theatre. In the theatrical profession it is an axiom that no matter what happens the curtain must go up, and in addition to being a stickler for tradition I hated the idea of turning away a full house ! I therefore explained the circumstances to the audience and stated that although we had neither scenery nor wardrobe we would, with their permission, do our best with the resources of the theatre, and craved their indulgence for any unavoidable shortcomings.

This permission being granted, more tacitly than enthusiastically, we then proceeded to give our performance of "The Silver King", under the most weird and primitive conditions that I imagine ^{this} that hoary old classic melodrama has ever been staged.

The "resources of the theatre", to which I had vaguely but confidently alluded, consisted of one ^{versatile} chamber set, painted a flat unrelieved scarlet so that there was no possible means of disguising or altering it for the various scenes of opulence and poverty it had to represent, except by transposing the various doors and windows with which luckily it was plentifully supplied. The only other scenery in the theatre ~~in addition to this versatile chamber set~~ was a woodland drop cloth which had to do duty for a London wharf and other scenes of a like nature for which it was eminently unsuited. Our wardrobe consisted of what we stood in, as all our personal luggage was on the lorry, while for make-up we were indebted to a local amateur who produced two sticks of grease paint which had to suffice for the entire company.

That excellent actor, Edward Landor, for several years associated with Miss Horniman at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, who was cast for the part of the landlord in the first scene, ^{but} had, for some reason or other, ^{he had} elected to travel with some members of the stage staff on the lorry. In his absence, the local amateur kindly consented to undertake his part; but as he was, of course, quite unfamiliar with the words, he was instructed as he stood

behind the bar serving drinks to his customers to open his mouth and pretend to be speaking whenever he felt a prod in the back from a long stick wielded by the stage manager who, concealed in the wings, would read his lines. When his lip movement failed to coordinate with the voice "off" stage, as all too frequently happened, it must be admitted there was a certain lack of realism to his impersonation. Fortunately the part was a short one.

Having surmounted this difficulty, we were confronted with another tough proposition in the last scene of the first act, when it was absolutely essential to the plot of the play that the character of Geoffrey Ware should be disposed of by means of a shot from a revolver. We managed to rake up an old revolver but no cartridges. A large paper bag hastily procured from the local grocer's, blown up and banged at the crucial moment in the wings proved a moderately effective substitute for the report of the revolver.

As "The Silver King" I had to adopt various disguises throughout the play, besides denoting a grief-stricken appearance by prematurely white hair. For the latter a packet of cornflour did the trick, and my disguises were carried out by the aid of an overcoat, a cap and blue jersey torn from the body of a protesting stage hand, and a beard teased from a rope end and attached to my face with seccotine. Fortunately I had an excellent and experienced company who gallantly backed up my efforts, so that the audience, more than half inclined to gibe

at some of our makeshifts in the earlier scenes, were quickly captivated by the strong drama of the good old play, and expressed their sympathy with our difficulties and approval of our efforts by applauding us to the echo at its conclusion.

When I was playing the dashing naval hero in "The Luck of the Navy" in Wellington, my wife and I were staying at the Midland Hotel where we shared a dining room table with a man and his wife who were strangers to us. He was an extremely quiet, pale-faced individual wearing powerful spectacles and so shy in his manner that he could hardly summon the requisite courage to ask one to pass the mustard, while any attempt to open up conversation with him was received with painful embarrassment. What was my astonishment to learn that this diffident, retiring, and outwardly unimpressive individual was one of the most famous of our naval V.C.'s who, now on a visit to New Zealand, had been responsible for one of the most daring and heroic acts in the Great War. It would be difficult to conceive a greater contrast than that provided by this naval hero in real life, and the one the author and I between us depicted in "The Luck of the Navy", yet there can be no doubt which would be more acceptable upon the stage as coinciding with the popular conception of how a hero should look and bear himself.

Was it not the late Leon M. Lion, who in his youthful days applying to Tree for a part in his production in ^{of} Julius Caesar, on being informed he was too small for a Roman, ventured to

suggest that he supposed there were small Romans ? To which suggestion Tree so wisely replied, "Not on the stage, my boy !"

In Dunedin where I had the pleasure of meeting General Sir William Birdwood, I am afraid I was guilty of a terrible faux pas by inviting him to witness a performance of "A Temporary Gentleman". I had not realized how he might react to some of the rather bitter gibes uttered by certain characters against regular officers, until a glance at the general's face as he sat in the stalls quickly enlightened me. But I am sure he was too good a sportsman to take offence, and indeed, he afterwards thanked me most cordially for the entertainment !

Exceedingly fond as I was, ~~£~~ and am, ~~£~~ of New Zealand and its people, I began to get a little weary at the end of a twelve-month of travelling up and down the Dominion. Also I was casting a longing eye towards Australia where the theatrical field offers so much more scope, and where as I had now accumulated sufficient capital I was anxious to organize my own Shakespearean Company. For this purpose I had sent to England for my Shakespearean wardrobe which had been stored there since 1913, and while waiting for its arrival and making other preparations, I returned to Australia and took the Princess Theatre, Melbourne, where meanwhile I produced "The Rotters" and "Hindle Wakes".

On 20th September, 1920, I launched what I proudly and even audaciously, in view of the struggles and difficulties with which I had to contend for the next ten years, announced as a

It was during this tour of New Zealand that we first met our old friend, Ngaio Marsh, who besides being widely known as a writer of crime novels with a score of best-sellers to her credit, is almost equally famous as a brilliant producer of both Shakespearean and modern plays. There is no limit to her artistic activities: she was one of the most gifted of the young New Zealand painters; and when she called on me at the old Theatre Royal in Christchurch, it was to show me a play she had written. My arrangements did not allow me to make use of her play, but I offered her an engagement in my Company, and with her high intelligence and unusual quality of voice she proved a very able actress. Later she was to make a big reputation as a broadcaster; and at yet another period of her varied career she founded and ran a very successful interior decorating business in London. Readers of her books will note that many of them are concerned with the stage: in one of them, Vintage Murder, practically the whole action takes place in the Theatre Royal, Christchurch, thinly disguised under the name of Middleton; and I am sure that amidst all her numerous activities the stage holds first place in her affections.

Another famous New Zealander whom I may claim to have helped in his career was Hector Bolitho, who came with me over to Australia to edit a magazine I published, The Shakespearean Quarterly. This proved to be the stepping stone to a wide literary field in England, as a biographer of Victorian royalty, and other great figures - including that distinguished actress, the late

Dame Marie Tempest; as a writer of plays and short stories, and as a lecturer and broadcaster, well known to audiences on both sides of the Atlantic.

permanent Australian Shakespearean Company. I also boldly stated that it was my intention to produce every one of the thirtyseven plays of Shakespeare, many of which had never before been staged in Australia.

With a very limited capital, the never-ending difficulty of obtaining theatres, combined with high rentals, and a population ^{then} of only six millions scattered over a huge continent to draw upon, the magnitude of my undertaking is better realized in retrospect than it was on the initiation of my venture.

Even so, had it not been for the economic depression which overtook Australia in 1929 I have little doubt I should have realized my ambitions. As it was, I carried on for ten years and produced no less than twentyseven Shakespearean plays until theatrical conditions became so appalling that I had no option but to disband my company.

Chapter XVI.

There is a superstition, at any rate amongst the older generation of actors, that Macbeth is an unlucky play, but as my wife and I had not hitherto appeared in Australia as the Macbeths and there would be a certain interest in our first appearance in the famous roles, and believing its evil reputation to be entirely undeserved, I decided to open my season with this tragedy.

I had devised a simplified system of staging whereby, instead of dividing the play into the arbitrary five acts, I produced it in two parts with one interval only of eight minutes. There is probably no play of Shakespeare that gains so much by this treatment as Macbeth, with its swift movement and continuity of action, ^{AND} ~~but~~ I eventually applied this method of staging with great advantage to all my Shakespearean productions, though naturally it underwent a good deal of change and experiment until I found the medium I required. ^ Apart from the fact that the plays are so constructed and written as to demand an uninterrupted movement, which is nullified by frequent and long breaks in the action, it has to be realized that the leisured days when people did not object to four long entractes of ten to fifteen minutes have passed. This fact was first appreciated in Vaudeville entertainment and since in the Cinema and most forms of musical entertainment. The legitimate theatre not only lags behind in this respect but

With the use of curtains and tapestries, a few backcloths and a number of set pieces, aided by judicious lighting I was able to get quite beautiful pictorial effects and all that Shakespeare demands to localise the scene and aid the imagination. A much better system I consider than that so frequently adopted nowadays in which one stylized scene does duty throughout the play and incongruously has to serve for interiors, of palaces, forest, battlefield scenes, etc.

many of the plays written for the modern stage are so short that the evening's entertainment has to be eked out with long intervals of twenty minutes or even longer while a listless and bored audience listen to canned music or the strains of an inadequate orchestra.

As several of my company with whom I ^{had} opened my first season in Melbourne in 1916, were still with me, I had not the same difficulty in organizing a Shakespearean company as I had then; and with the inclusion later of two or three excellent actors who happened to be available, including the ex-Bensonian, Plumpton Wilson, I gradually built up a very strong and efficient company. For this production of "Macbeth" I also engaged two veterans of the Australian stage; one being an actor of the name of Norton Griffiths who had in his time played Richard III with some fame in this same city, but who now, such are the cruel vicissitudes of our profession, gratefully accepted a very small part in Macbeth. He was eighty-four years old, and age and infirmity had conspired to give him a peculiar shuffling gait, so that he always seemed to be on the verge of tottering over. However, there is a character in Macbeth designated merely "an old man", for which his infirmities were no disability. It was my suggestion that he should carry a staff which I thought would be in character and incidentally help to support him. After two or three rehearsals he came to me and asked if he might discard the staff as "it interfered with his gesticulation". Not wishing to hurt the

poor old chap's feelings, I tactfully said, "Well, Mr Griffiths, my idea in suggesting you should carry a staff was because you are described as 'an old man' and I thought it would help to give an illusion of age." "Ah ! yes, so it would; quite true; thank you, I will retain the staff," said the old fellow, as looking about a hundred and twenty, he tottered contentedly away.

The other old stager, Fanny Wiseman, was a mere seventy-five, and although of almost diminutive physique could proudly boast of having played Lady Macbeth at the precocious age of fourteen. She was a complete contrast to old Griffiths, being easily the brightest young thing in the company, and to see her made up as the Third Witch sitting on the edge of a dressing room table swinging her legs and puffing a cigarette or hopping about the stage like a cricket, to say nothing of her skittish exit through the stage door with a "Good night, dearies, I mustn't miss my damned tram !", was an inspiration and a tonic.

After a fortnight's run of Macbeth, which was a very successful production and aroused considerable interest, I revived a number of other Shakespearean plays from my repertoire during a two months' season.

The initial expenses of this venture had eaten up the major portion of my meagre capital, and as the business generally had barely covered my running expenses, it appeared at the end of my season as if my ambitious project was doomed to failure. It was at this juncture as I sat in my dressing room in a very despondent

mood that Mr Isaacson, representing the Hon. Hugh D. McIntosh who was just about to produce Chu Chin Chow as a replica of the production then running at His Majesty's Theatre, London, knocked at my door and entered the room. After introducing himself, he informed me he came on behalf of Mr McIntosh to ask if I would play the title-role in Chu Chin Chow, for which he was authorized to offer me a year's contract at £100 a week. Considering the parlous state of my finances and the great uncertainty as to my immediate future, I often wonder that I had the courage to refuse such a munificent offer, the like of which I have never had before or since.

A certain vein of obstinacy in my nature; a rooted dislike to acknowledging defeat; the knowledge that my acceptance of his offer would throw all my company out of work, - and many of them had been with me several years - were the various factors that induced me, much to the surprise of Mr Isaacson, who was not totally unaware of my circumstances, to refuse to succumb to the temptation. Instead of doing so I journeyed with my company to Geelong and Adelaide where my fortitude was rewarded by most profitable seasons.

My friend, the Hon. J.H. Keating, who represented Tasmania in the Federal Senate, had strongly advised me to visit the Island State, where he assured me a Shakespearean season would be greatly appreciated. Accordingly I had booked the Theatre Royal, Hobart, which, it is interesting to note, is reputed to be

the oldest theatre in the Southern Hemisphere - for a fortnight commencing on Boxing Day.

Australia was in the throes of one of its constantly recurring shipping strikes, and the usual mailboat service to Launceston being discontinued, the only means of reaching Tasmania was by small cargo steamers that were unaffected by the strike. Therefore on my return to Melbourne from Adelaide I found the only possible method by which I could fulfil my booking at Hobart was to send half my company with the scenery by one of these cargo vessels to Launceston, and the remainder, including my wife and myself, by another running to Port Stanley on the north west coast. The detachment via Launceston had a comparatively easy journey, but we unfortunate ones who went via Port Stanley left on the afternoon of the 23rd December in a heat wave with a temperature of 105 degrees, and travelled with some three hundred fellow passengers in a boat licensed to carry about forty and cabin accommodation for perhaps a dozen. After some thirty hours of these sufficiently uncomfortable conditions we arrived at Port Stanley late on the evening of the 24th, where we had supper at the local hostelry and then clambered into a species of motor charabanc of a very old fashioned type, incapable of going more than sixteen miles an hour on the hilly roads we had to travel. In this conveyance we motored all that night and throughout ~~the~~ ^{Christmas} following day under a scorching sun, only stopping for hasty meals, finally arriving in Hobart late ^{in the evening} ~~on Christmas Day~~ more dead than

alive ! It is fortunate that the actor's life has occasional and compensations.

As I entered the hotel on our arrival in Hobart, in a state of utter exhaustion, I was greeted by a man from Melbourne with whom I had a slight acquaintance.

"Hullo," he said, "what are you doing here ?"

"Oh, I've just arrived with my company to play a season at the theatre," I replied.

"For how long - two days ?"

"No, two weeks."

"Then God help you."

Not a very encouraging reception at the end of such a journey, nor was it in accord with that cheery note that is supposed to prevail at the festive Christmas season.

It is probable that his greeting was based on the reputation which Hobart bore of being an "actor's grave", and whereas the town at this time of year was usually crowded with visitors who come over to escape the heat of the mainland, the hotels and boarding houses were all empty owing to the shipping strike.

However I am glad to state that my friend Keating's prophecies were more than justified. The Hobart people welcomed our visit with the greatest enthusiasm, and despite the absence of tourists, ~~with the exception of the first night,~~ "House Full" boards were on view throughout the season.

The success of our first visit to Hobart led to our playing

an annual Christmas season there, usually of about four weeks and generally preceded by a most enjoyable holiday spent on Brunely Island. The island is only separated from the mainland of Tasmania by the narrow D'Entrecasteaux Straits, but the conditions were delightfully primitive. Motor-cars, hotels, golf courses were all unknown, and the few inhabitants dwelt in arcadian simplicity tending their orchards.

The population of Hobart was but some fifty odd thousand and in this small community we became on very intimate terms with our audiences during our successive visits, and also made a host of personal friends, amongst whom I recall with gratitude the Hon. J.A. Lyons, the Premier of Tasmania (later Prime Minister of Australia and to whom I have referred) for his kindly sympathy and assistance in my enterprise.

I have frequently quoted Hobart as being the most remarkable Shakespearean centre for its size of any place I have ever visited, but let it not therefrom be deduced that all the inhabitants are Shakespearean students. Such a belief is clearly disproved, I think, from the whispered conversation overheard between two prominent citizens of Hobart who were seated in the dress circle of the Theatre Royal on a night when we were playing "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

As there was a nightly change of programme they had evidently confused the date and imagined they were witnessing King John, but when I made my entrance half way through the play, as Bottom

wearing the Ass's head, it began to dawn upon one of them that my appearance in this fantastic guise hardly accorded with the kingly and martial atmosphere to be expected in a historical play of Shakespeare, and he whispered, "You know I don't believe this is King John at all." "Shush!" replied the other, "Of course it is, don't show your ignorance!"

This reminds me of an incident that happened in Melbourne. A man who was evidently not a Shakespeare fan, and equally unacquainted with his plays as our friends in Hobart, came to the box-office of the Princess Theatre one day when I was playing a season there and inquired, "What's on to-night?" "Coriolanus," replied the box-office clerk. "Oh, thank God it's not Shakespeare, give me two stalls please."

From Hobart we visited Launceston on the beautiful river Tamar, the northern capital of Tasmania, followed by seasons in Sydney and Brisbane and other centres in Queensland.

Of Queensland I have very happy memories. Our visits were always made in mid-winter when I imagine there is no more perfect climate in the world, though in the summer, of course, it can be unpleasantly hot. To anyone desiring a maximum of sunshine under the most favourable conditions, and with the necessary funds and leisure to indulge their taste, I would recommend them to winter in Queensland, spend the summer in Tasmania, the spring in Sydney and

the autumn in Melbourne. By so doing they would escape all the extremes of which Australia is capable and live under the most felicitous climatic conditions that are to be found anywhere on the globe.

While staying at the Bellevue Hotel in Brisbane during one of my seasons I first had the pleasure of meeting Chief Justice Isaacs, (later, as Sir Isaac Isaacs, he was to become the first Australian Governor-General of his country). As I was chatting with him and Mrs Isaacs one day in the lounge of the hotel after lunch he asked me for my opinion of the Baconian theory regarding the authorship of Shakespeare's plays? To attribute the authorship of the plays to anyone but William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon has always struck me as infinitely preposterous, and I immediately proceeded to say so at some length and with considerable vigour, and I also expressed my unmeasured contempt for the half-wits who held such an absurd belief. When I had concluded my tirade the Judge calmly remarked, "I am very interested to hear your opinion, Mr Wilkie, because my wife is an ardent Baconian." I found it difficult to forgive the Judge for having led me into such an embarrassing situation without a preliminary word of lead, warning.

However, this incident does not lessen my appreciation of a story told of him by my friend Keating, which occurred many years ago when he was still Mr Isaacs, and a member of Parliament, sitting in opposition to Sir George Reid, in which he scored heavily off that past master of repartee.

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It is necessary to explain that Sir George was an extremely stout man, and of what his enemies might have called a somewhat porcine appearance, while Mr Isaacs needless to say was of the Jewish faith.

In the course of a debate in which Sir George was speaking, he unsuccessfully endeavoured with all the arts at his command to extract an interjection from Mr Isaacs who sat stolidly silent with folded arms. At last in a vain and perhaps rather feeble attempt to draw Mr Isaacs, he said, "From the expression on the face of the honourable gentleman in front of me, I believe he would like to eat me if he could." "No," quietly replied Mr Isaacs, "it would be against my religion." For once, the famous Sir George was silenced.

From Queensland we made a long tour of New Zealand, followed by a journey of 4,000 miles to Perth in Western-Australia, and then 2,500 miles back to Melbourne once more. Altogether about 6,500 miles to play one town!

A town to which I made several visits was Broken Hill, an extremely prosperous mining town in the midst of a desert situated at the westernmost point of New South Wales. Zinc, silver, lead, and other valuable minerals have been mined there to the value of millions of pounds, but it is a hideous place, a money-getter and nothing else. The mine workings with their great mountains of slag encroach upon the main streets. The town is built mostly of galvanized iron and the shacks of the miners are surrounded by

tin cans and rotting garbage. Yet in this unpromising atmosphere my friend Goodhart, (~~incidentally the cousin of an actor of the same name fairly well-known on the London stage about fifty years ago~~) the proprietor of Broken Hill's big department store, when he reached middle age had suddenly found himself possessed of, not only a taste, but a most exceptional talent for etching. With never a lesson in either drawing or etching, entirely self-taught from text-books, even making his own presses and many of the necessary tools, in a few years he was exhibiting his truly beautiful work in the leading galleries of Europe.

The lack of normal recreational facilities in Broken Hill throwing people back on their inner resources was doubtless responsible for the crop of unusual characters it produced. Another interesting personality there was Dr MacFillivray who maintained a miniature zoo in his garden and was a recognized authority on the fauna of Australia.

Having been a wanderer all my life with no roots in any one place is perhaps the reason why I have never been able to wholeheartedly sympathize with the affection, not to say admiration, that so many people come to feel for their "home town". Even so I think I was justifiably amazed when a native of that most unattractive town returning from an extended tour abroad visiting all the fairest capitals and beauty spots of the old world had only one comment to make on his travels, - "Well, give ME Broken Hill."

On a Sunday evening I happened to get into conversation with a man in the bar of the Masonic Hotel, where I was staying during one of my seasons in Broken Hill, who told me he had just driven in from his station (Australianese for sheep or cattle run), a matter of two hundred and fifty miles to the north, and he further informed me his nearest neighbour was about eighty miles away.

"Don't you find it very lonely ?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, with his lazy Australian drawl, "I did think it a bit lonely at one time so I moved down to another station I own near Adelaide and there I had some neighbours only a dozen miles off, but I couldn't stand the bloody people looking over my fences so I came back."

Evidently there are degrees of loneliness.

Thus far my project had been fairly successful financially. Shakespeare had not been staged in many of the towns I visited for twenty years or more, but, of course, on my return seasons there was no longer the element of novelty which attached to my first visits, and it was, therefore, necessary to maintain the interest by constantly adding new productions to my repertoire. Unfortunately when one has exhausted the more popular plays of Shakespeare there is but a limited clientele for those that are lesser known, such as, say, "Coriolanus" or "The Two Gentlemen of Verona". I was further handicapped by my constant difficulty in obtaining theatres at suitable times and in their natural geographical rotation, as theatres were only available when the proprietors

did not require them for one of their own companies. This often necessitated huge journeys when a theatre did happen to fall vacant, or else filling in time in small towns, where at the best, it was impossible to meet the expenses of a large company.

It was recognized on all sides, however, that I was playing a lone hand in my endeavours to keep the Shakespearean flag flying, and the practical support and sympathy I received from the public, the press, the educational authorities and ultimately from the various governments of Australia were such that I shall always remember with pride and gratitude.

Only in such a democratic country as Australia could this sympathy with my efforts have been manifested - to take one of many instances - as in the practical assistance of Sir Elliott Johnstone, the Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives, who in his youth had been trained as a scenic artist, and who between the sittings of the House in Melbourne before Canberra became the seat of government would come across to the Theatre, don overalls, and paint a backcloth for one of my productions.

~~No matter how great his sympathy might be with the "Old Vic" one can hardly imagine the Speaker of the House of Commons running across between sessions to the theatre to lend a hand in their preparations for a new production.~~

From the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. W.M. Hughes, who was popularly known to all Australians as "Billy" Hughes, I also received much encouragement. He was possessed of a colourful and dynamic personality and had made his presence felt at the

Peace negotiations at Versailles. A little man with a hatchet face, beloved of the caricaturists because of his marked resemblance to the Mad Hatter of "Alice in Wonderland". He was very deaf and as a hearing aid he had an apparatus in a small square box to which was attached an earphone. I frequently attended sittings of the Federal Parliament at the time he was Prime Minister. It was a great joy to watch him clutching his earphone while he was listening intently to an opposition speaker, for whenever anything was stated to which he took violent exception down would go the ear-phone with a sharp rap upon the table and as far as the P.M. was concerned the speaker would find himself addressing the empty air. (Curiously enough, by the way, on an occasion when he invited me to join him in his carriage travelling from Melbourne to Sydney, I noticed that the noise of the train instead of increasing his deafness seemed to act as an antidote, for while the train was in motion he was able to dispense with his hearing aid and only took it up again when the train stopped at stations.) Like his great prototype, Mr Lloyd George, Mr Hughes rose from comparatively humble circumstances, and in his highly varied and picturesque career had followed many callings, amongst others that of a stage super, and he related this experience to me in these words as near as I can recall them, but in his own inimitable and humorous manner:

"I have been," he said, "not a great star upon whom the limelight played. I have been a poor, humble super. I led the

attack on the drawbridge of Harfleur at the Battle of Agincourt, which took place some centuries ago. I took that place so often that I knew every stone in it. I slew the same people, night after night, and met them on the following evening in the best of health. Never were battles so bloody and never was victory so bloodless. I well remember following Rignold. He was a great actor - great in every respect; he weighed at least eighteen stone. In addition, he was clad in shining armour, and his movements were vigorous - and reckless.

"One of my poor colleagues was chosen to perish upon the drawbridge of Harfleur, with his head hanging in melancholy fashion over the side. And there, as he lay prone, bleeding and dead, upon his unprotected belly Rignold strode. And when my poor friend curled up like a salted worm and wriggled about in very vigorous and lively fashion, the Irish super-master shouted angrily, 'God damn your soul, lie still, you're dead !' You will understand, my friend, that in those days we well earned the fifteen shillings a week that we were paid. To die is the common lot of mankind. And after death the grave, and later the resurrection. But on the bridge of Harfleur, death was the least difficult and the most painful; for after death came George Rignold's eighteen stone, with spurs six inches long; and upon the unprotected belly of a fifteen shillings a week super that was more than human flesh and blood could stand."

Another anecdote told me of, but not by, Mr Hughes, apropos

of his engagement with George Rignold (was) that he once led a strike of the supers, being even in those days an acknowledged leader of men, for a weekly wage of a pound as against the fifteen shillings they were receiving, and that he was chased out of the theatre by the irate and indignant George, who from a long identification with kingly roles combined with a naturally imperious nature, the moment he entered upon his theatrical domains was in the habit of regarding himself as George "Rex".

During one of my conversations with Mr Hughes, he discussed the proposition of a National Theatre in Australia for the presentation of Shakespeare and Grand Opera, and with his keen sympathy for the arts and his broad vision I have little doubt the scheme would have matured had he remained in Office, but alas ! his Prime Ministership terminated a few months later and my hopes in that direction were shattered.

His charming wife, Dame Mary, was one of the most constant patrons of our seasons in both Sydney and Melbourne and rarely came to the theatre without paying us a visit behind the scenes. Mr Hughes on account of his deafness seldom witnessed a play himself, but amongst the many hundreds of telegrams, letters and messages I received ~~from every part of Australia and New Zealand~~ when I was decorated with the C.B.E., in recognition of my Shakespearean work none gave me more pleasure than the following:

play "My dear Mr Allan Wilkie,

Heartiest congratulations on your well-deserved honour.

You have earned it many times over. With best wishes. I am,

Yours truly,

W. M. HUGHES."

For many years I had great delight in the friendship of a very charming and a very old lady who was the widow of Dr Smith, one-time dramatic critic of "The Age" in Melbourne. She had come to Australia as the very youthful bride of Dr Smith, at the age of seventeen, in the early ^{1850's.} ~~fifties~~; but although over ninety when I knew her, she was an exceptionally bright and highly intelligent old lady with a most keen memory and was therefore a most interesting link with the early theatrical history of Australia. I first made the acquaintance of Mrs Smith in Melbourne; later she moved to Ballarat, and I never failed to call upon her during my brief seasons in the latter city and she on her part never failed to attend all my performances, in which I was greatly honoured as she had given up all other play-going owing to her advanced years. It was my great joy to listen to her reminiscences of Gustavus Vaughan Brooke, Barry Sullivan, Mr ^{and} Mrs Charles Kean and other giants of the past. Not only had she still a vivid recollection of them in all their famous roles, but she and her husband ^{had been} ~~were~~ in the habit of entertaining them as their guests. Brooke was the idol of her youthful

playgoing and with all his failings was her beau ideal of an Irish gentleman. Barry Sullivan, while she admired his great gifts as an actor, she regarded as an extremely vulgar person socially. The Keans, I gathered, she admired more socially than as artists.

Another good friend was Dr Strong, lecturer on literature at Melbourne University and later, until his much lamented decease some years ago, as Sir Archibald Strong, Professor of Literature at the University of Adelaide. Besides being a wholehearted enthusiast for the drama in general and the Elizabethan drama in particular, he was one of the greatest intellectual forces in Australia, and notwithstanding his many interests devoted endless time and energy to the furthering of my aims.

But with all the encouragement and championship of my cause, it was a constant fight to keep my head above water. With weekly expenses ranging from £1,000 to £1,400 and rarely, and then only during short and intermittent periods of comparative prosperity, a bank balance of more than two or three hundred pounds, it required very skilful financial juggling wherewith to meet my salary list, with unflinching regularity, at the end of each week.

To add to my troubles, in the early part of 1922 the constant strain of our large repertoire and the incessant travelling (we covered about 10,000 miles a year) told upon

my wife's health and she had to take a complete rest for about nine months. This was a particularly heavy blow as, apart from her personal popularity with our audiences, it was practically impossible to find another actress with her unique versatility, her characters ranging from Titania to Lady Macbeth. However, I was fortunate in securing the services of an exceptionally talented Australian actress in Miss Hilda Dorrington who held the fort until my wife's return.

By that time, however, I had just completed a particularly disastrous tour of New Zealand, so that when I landed with my company in Sydney I was absolutely at the end of my financial tether.

This fact did not deter me from booking the Prince of Wales Theatre, Adelaide, for a month's season, and I confidently informed the members of my company we would re-open there in a few weeks' time. Then I went over to Melbourne to try and raise the necessary capital to recommence operations which, for transport and other preliminary expenses, I estimated at £400. All my efforts to raise this, or indeed any sum, were quite fruitless, and after ^{some} a few days, with only a few shillings in my pocket, I thought I might as well call at the Union Bank of Australia in Collins Street where I had my private account, to see if by some lucky fluke there might be a pound or two to my credit that would be helpful for my immediate personal requirements. From my memories of my last dealings with this account, I did not

anticipate finding more than two or three pounds, or more optimistically, possibly a fiver. However, any sum would be useful to me in my present circumstances.

I went up to the accountant and inquired the amount of my credit. He disappeared for a moment and then pushed a slip across the counter (it is a treasured souvenir) with the amazing total of £395. 12. 2. My heart gave a great leap, the blood rushed to my head, and the figures danced before me, - £395. 12. 2. Exactly the sum within a few negligible pounds that I required, and which I had been vainly endeavouring to raise for a week past. My momentary elation was immediately succeeded by profound disappointment. Of course it was a mistake. "Excuse me," I said to the accountant, "but these figures are not correct." With a look such as only a bank official can give one when doubt is thrown upon his accuracy, he again retired into the distance, where summoning an assistant, they jointly pored over a huge ledger for several minutes. Then my friend once more approached me and in a tone of mingled severity and reproof, said, "Those figures are quite correct, Mr Wilkie." The poor misguided but thrice-blessed fellow obviously imagined that I was of opinion that my balance was larger, whereas it was about a hundred times greater than I had thought possible.

I had no idea how I came to have such an unexpectedly large sum to my credit, but it was no time to express further doubts. I rushed off to the telegraph office and wired the good news to

my wife who had remained in Sydney, had a couple of stiff drinks to brace me up after the shock, then communicated with the members of my company, and to come to the end of a long story went to Adelaide where in my four weeks' season I cleared a profit of over £1,000 !

After this providential piece of good luck, I, of course, met with further reverses and it seemed to me the only hope I had of continuing with my enterprise would be in the elimination, or at any rate a reduction, of the huge expense of transport which in the aggregate ran into many thousands a year.

In May of 1923 there happened to be a conference of the Premiers of the Australian States presided over by the Prime Minister, and I took the opportunity of circularizing the P.M. and the Premiers prior to the conference, requesting them in view of the educational value of my work to grant free transport for my company and effects over the various Commonwealth and State Railways. This unusual and indeed unprecedented demand was, I believe, received with some amazement but not altogether unsympathetically, and although it was decided not to take any joint action, the matter was left to the individual discretion of the Premiers. Fortunately, I had previously enlisted the sympathies of the Hon. E.G. Theodore, Premier of Queensland, and he immediately granted me a fifty per cent rebate on the usual theatrical rates of transport in his State.

His action was soon followed by Mr Lyons, the then Premier

of Tasmania, and also by my friend ^{Mr} Sir (^{later Sir} ~~then Mr~~) T.R. Bavin, Premier of ^{New South} N.S. Wales; and by dint of continual representations I eventually secured absolutely free transport over the entire railway system of Australia, while later, through the medium of the Premier, the Right Hon. Joseph Ward, free transport throughout New Zealand. In addition, my performances were entirely exempted from entertainment tax in both countries.

The granting of special railway facilities to my company by the Queensland Government in May, 1923, and the subsequent action on the part of the other governments, I regard as an epoch-making event in the history of the Theatre, as I believe it was the first occasion in which any government in the British Empire gave even an indirect subsidy to the drama, thereby recognizing it as an important educational and cultural factor in our social life.

The achievement of my thousandth performance was given wide publicity in the , and my wife and I were the recipients of hundreds of congratulatory messages, from all over the Commonwealth, from people in all walks of life. Perhaps it would be permissible to quote one - typical of many - from the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. G. M. Bruce (now Viscount Bruce of Melbourne).

"I desire to congratulate Mr Allen Wilkie and Miss Hunter-Watts on the occasion of their 1,000 continuous performance in Australia of Shakespearean plays.

"This is indeed a unique achievement, and Mr Wilkie is to be greatly commended for the manner in which he has laboured to
 Chapter XVII. of Shakespeare better known throughout Australia.

"It is due in no small measure to Mr Wilkie's efforts that
 At Brisbane on 13th June, 1924, I gave my thousandth consecutive performance with an entirely Shakespearean repertoire, which I claimed constituted a record in the three hundred and odd years that these plays had been acted. Many actors and organizations have, of course, given many thousands of Shakespearean performances, as indeed I have myself, but their repertoire has invariably been interspersed with non-Shakespearean plays, and I question whether any other company had given even five hundred consecutive performances of Shakespearean plays. Ultimately I increased my record to 1,239 performances before I again introduced the old comedies into my repertoire.

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"I desire to congratulate Mr Allan Wilkie and Miss Hunter-Watts on the occasion of their 1,000 continuous performance in Australia of Shakespearean plays.

"This is indeed a unique achievement, and Mr Wilkie is to be greatly commended for the manner in which he has laboured to make the works of Shakespeare better known throughout Australia.

"It is due in no small measure to Mr Wilkie's efforts that Shakespeare is something more than a name in this country. His enthusiastic and unremitting activity is particularly commendable, as the production of Shakespearean plays cannot be regarded as the most lucrative of theatrical enterprises. Mr Wilkie, in carrying on his self-appointed task, is really performing a duty of a national character, and the value of his efforts should be appreciated very highly indeed by the people of Australia.

"I hope that his splendid work may long continue and that every success may attend him.

~~(Signed)~~ S. M. BRUCE."

I commemorated my thousandth performance with a production of "Cymbeline", which was also the twentieth Shakespearean play I had produced to date. At the conclusion of the performance a presentation was made upon the stage by His Excellency Sir Matthew Nathan, the Governor of Queensland, of an illuminated address and gold watches to my wife and myself from "The People of Queensland". Sir Matthew also paid us the honour of being present at a private dinner ^{given} tendered us by the members of the company to celebrate the occasion.

During Sir Matthew's long term of office in Queensland - he was one of the most popular of its governors - he was a

constant and enthusiastic patron of our performances, and my wife and I frequently had the privilege of being his guests at Government House and many years later at his delightful old Manor House in Somerset. I have particularly pleasant recollections of his delightfully informal Sunday evening supper parties when servants were dispensed with, and the Governor and his Aides personally waited upon the guests, amongst whom one could always count upon finding whatever interesting visitors happened to be in Brisbane at the time.

It was at one of these parties that I had the pleasure of meeting Sir Hubert Wilkins, the famous explorer, whose quiet, diffident manner in nowise suggested the intrepid adventurer accustomed to facing enormous hazards and undergoing the most terrible hardships. But my experience tends to show that modesty is ever the attribute of true greatness. Two of the most modest and unassuming individuals with whom I have ever come in contact were my friend, General Sir John Monash, and Viscount Jellicoe, whom I had the privilege of meeting on several occasions when he was Governor-General of New Zealand.

I recall a rather delightful incident when my wife and I were the guests at an informal tea party with Lord and Lady Jellicoe and their family. His youngest daughter, a child of about six, who had been presented with a large picture book of ships of every description, seated herself upon the great Admiral's knee, opened the book for his inspection, looked up in his face and innocently enquired, "Daddy, do you know anything

about ships?" "A little, my dear," he modestly replied.

~~The one occasion on which I must confess to feeling ill at ease in the Admiral's presence was when as the guest of honour at a luncheon in Wellington, I found myself called upon to address a large gathering with Lord Jellicoe seated on my immediate left and the Prime Minister of New Zealand on my right, and I admit to being considerably perturbed at the proximity of such distinguished though most considerate listeners.~~

Another interesting personality whom I met as a fellow guest of Sir Matthew's was the Maharaja of ^{Jhalawar.} Jalaware. As His Highness expressed great interest in the Maoris of New Zealand I recounted sundry anecdotes illustrating their salient characteristics. One story I told, as indicative of their innate chivalry, was of how in one of the Maori wars when a small British force was beleaguered by a tribe of Maoris it came to the knowledge of their Chieftain that the British troops had run out of food and water, whereupon the Chieftain immediately sent them ample supplies of both and called a truce for twenty-four hours until they had refreshed themselves, as he held there was no honour to be won in fighting starving men!

The Maharaja at once capped this tale with a story of an ancestor of his who was the then ruling prince of ^{Jhalawar.} Jalaware. He received information that the Prince of an adjacent State with whom he had a deadly feud was about to attack him. As there was a large tract of desert separating their respective dominions, he at once despatched a large body of his retainers to dig wells

and deposit large quantities of provender at intermediate stages in order to facilitate the approach of the army of his antagonist.

Such chivalrous conduct as these two anecdotes illustrate may strike some people as ultra-Quixotic in these days of ruthless warfare, but no one I think can withhold their admiration for the magnanimity of spirit they reveal.

Brisbane again marked an important milestone in my career, for it was when again playing a season there in the following year in June, 1925, that my name appeared in the Birthday Honours List as the recipient of C.B.E., ~~in recognition of my work in the production of Shakespeare in Australia,~~ and my pleasure in the honour bestowed upon me was intensified by the messages of goodwill and congratulations that again reached me from every quarter. *part of Australia and New Zealand.*

Not only had Brisbane ^{June 27.} ~~in two consecutive months of June~~ ^{years; but this} proved to be an eventful place to me but June was apparently a fateful month, for in June, 1926, a further momentous experience befell me, though not, in its outset at least, of so pleasing a nature as the two important happenings that preceded it, and one which but for the extraordinary generosity of the Australian people might have effectively brought my Shakespearean tours to a close.

On the 21st June we arrived in the Victorian city of Geelong where the whole of my wardrobe and scenery was deposited preparatory to the opening of our season on the following day.

In the early hours of the 22nd, I was awakened by the landlord of my hotel with the disastrous news that the theatre was on fire. Hastily throwing on some clothes I rushed round to the building to find it a smouldering heap of ruins; and all my property, the accumulation of over twenty years was utterly destroyed. The habitual difficulties of financing my company had forbidden the additional expense of the heavy premiums demanded by the Insurance Companies on the effects of a touring company in Australia, so I was faced with a total loss.

Although I was filled with dismay and overwhelmed by the disaster that had overtaken me, I announced to the reporters by whom I was besieged on my return to Melbourne that, somehow and somewhere, I intended to carry on with my Shakespearean productions.

While I was still wondering how I was to emulate the Phoenix, the problem was solved for me. Within forty-eight hours of the fire, occurring my friends in Melbourne formed a committee, and an appeal for funds to re-condition my company was launched through the medium of the Press in every city in Australia. The theatrical profession also very graciously organized benefit performances in various centres. At the performance in Melbourne in which I played Shylock in the Trial Scene from "The Merchant of Venice", I had the honour of being supported by twelve of the leading barristers of that city who represented the "Council of Twelve".

By these means over £4,000 was raised, and as it was necessary for me to make a hurried trip to England to procure materials, the Orient S. S. Company, in their usual philanthropic spirit, tangibly expressed their sympathy by making me the guest of their Line to and from London.

When I look back on that period it is with mingled feelings of heartfelt gratitude and pride, which was shared by my wife. Gratitude to the people of Australia for their munificent kindness and a pride that we had by our devotion to the cause of Shakespeare succeeded in winning their regard and affection as manifested by such a practical demonstration of their sympathy in our misfortune, coupled with the desire thus indicated that our work should continue; a most welcome proof that our labours were considered of national importance, and that its termination would be a distinct loss to the community.

Such an act of spontaneous and warmhearted generosity to "a poor player" is so far as I know without precedent, and I much doubt if it could have happened in any country but Australia.

presented with an illuminated address preparatory to our opening at the Princess Theatre with Henry VIII. On my first entrance as Cardinal Wolsey I thought the applause which commenced about half a minute before I actually appeared would never cease. The unique circumstances attending my return to their midst intensified the natural warmth of feeling of the Melbourne public and resulted in such a demonstration, that I was momentarily

Chapter XVIII.

Ten weeks were spent in England in purchasing all the paraphernalia of wardrobe, armour, wigs etc. requisite for fitting out my company once more, and on my return to Australia I immediately plunged into preparations for a season I had already planned to open at Hobart in January.

Here I must pay a tribute to the loyalty of my company and staff, practically every one of whom, although over six months had elapsed since we disbanded at Geelong and they were now scattered in various companies all over Australia, once more joined up under my banner.

Little Hobart gave us a royal welcome and we produced Henry VIII, (for which I had been successful in obtaining Sir Herbert Tree's wardrobe when in London), and also Antony and Cleopatra. With these novelties added to my repertoire we went to Melbourne where I was ^{given} ~~tendered~~ a civic reception and presented with an illuminated address, preparatory to our opening at the Princess Theatre with Henry VIII. On my first entrance as Cardinal Wolsey I thought the applause which commenced about half a minute before I actually appeared would never cease. The unique circumstances attending my return to their midst intensified the natural warmth of feeling of the Melbourne public and resulted in such a demonstration, that I was momentarily

unnerved and truly thankful that my first scene was almost a speechless one.

Similar receptions followed in Queensland, New Zealand, and Adelaide, but I was very anxious to play a season in Sydney which, owing to my inability to obtain a theatre, I had been debarred from visiting for some years. To tour Australia permanently with a Shakespearean repertoire and yet be obliged to omit the largest city in the Commonwealth, and the third largest in the British Empire, from one's itinerary, was a truly intolerable situation. Moreover, as, despite my long absence from Sydney, the public of that city had subscribed a large amount towards the fund after the fire at Geelong, I felt that apart from any other consideration I owed a duty to play a season there if it could possibly be arranged.

As all my efforts to obtain one of the recognized city theatres were unavailing, I at last in desperation arranged with the Fuller firm to take a theatre of theirs in an industrial suburb of Sydney called Newtown, which is a working-class district situated about a couple of miles or so from the centre of the City. The theatre was a very large barn-like structure which, hitherto, had been entirely devoted to vaudeville and the cheapest form of blood and thunder melodrama, and had latterly had a very unsuccessful career.

I cannot recollect a single favourable opinion being expressed on my decision and the general consensus seemed to be

that I was utterly mad, (though there were hundreds to tell me afterwards when it turned out a great success that "they knew I would do well there"). I was cheerfully informed that Shakespeare at Newtown would be received with brickbats and that my season would open and close on the first night.

However, undeterred by these gloomy prophecies I went ahead with my plans, first soliciting the aid of Lady de Chair who apart from her social position as the wife of His Excellency the Governor of ^{New South} ~~N. S.~~ Wales, was a great force in artistic circles in Sydney. In response to a letter, I received a telegram expressing her fullest sympathy with my project and promising her utmost assistance. Thanks, largely I am convinced, to ^{her} ~~the~~ championship of my cause, ~~by Lady de Chair,~~ and partly perhaps owing to the very audacity of producing Shakespeare in Newtown capturing the imagination of the Sydney public, the season eventually exceeded my wildest hopes. It is true it hung fire for the first few weeks, but the presence of the Governor and Lady de Chair, not only on the first night but sometimes two or three nights a week, helped by degrees to make Newtown temporarily the most fashionable theatre in Sydney. The season, originally arranged for an experimental two weeks, extended to fourteen, and during the last weeks the vast auditorium was unable to accommodate the crowds that flocked from every part of Sydney to see my productions.

As to the behaviour of the much-maligned Newtown people who

filled the cheaper parts of the theatre, I have never played to a better mannered or more attentive audience. From the beginning to the end of the season there was not a solitary interruption or the slightest discordant note.

I may justly claim to have put the Majestic Theatre on the map for when the newly-formed Elizabethan Theatre Trust was casting round for a suitable theatre in which to commence operations the recollections of my two highly successful seasons there encouraged them to take it over, and now, after extensive renovations, it has become what is practically the National Theatre of Australia. A big rise in the world for the former "blood-tub".

This incursion into the suburbs having proved so successful, I made an extended tour of the surrounding districts of Sydney, playing in Picture Theatres or whatever suitable Halls were available. This little tour took us to Parramatta, the original capital of *New South Wales,* N.S.W. and now almost in the suburban area of rapidly growing Sydney.

From the presentation of his plays in Australia over a long period, my name became so closely associated with that of Shakespeare that this often led to ludicrous errors on the part of the more unsophisticated portion of the public in the country towns. Frequently after seeing me upon the stage, people complained that I was not at all like a greatly enlarged portrait of Shakespeare displayed upon my posters on the hoardings and thought to represent me ! But the most amusing incident relating

to this confusion of identity occurred during my season in Parramatta where we played in the Town Hall. The old custodian of the Hall was apparently a well known local character and on familiar terms with all the residents. Arrayed in his municipal uniform he stationed himself on the first night at the entrance to the Hall, and greeted my prospective patrons. I happened to be in front of the building preparatory to getting made up for "Shylock", and unseen by him I overheard him chatting to a group of three or four people whom, probably more concerned for the honour of his beloved Hall than in my interest, he was evidently endeavouring to persuade to go in and see the play. One of the party, still hesitating, I overheard say, "You know it requires a very good actor to play the part of Shylock". "Oh," replied my friend, "this man's good, he's wonderful - he's the original - he wrote it !" Thus did he for ever dispose of the Baconian, and all other theories regarding the authorship of Shakespeare's plays.

One of the minor penalties of being a Shakespearean actor-manager is to be inundated with a mass of correspondence, and situated as I was, the sole representative of Shakespeare on the stage in Australia and New Zealand, the daily post contained a vast assortment of letters, in addition to those of ordinary business routine, from playgoers some of whom would write in a laudatory and others in a critical vein of my productions, while those of the older generation would favour me with personal

reminiscences of Creswick who visited Australia in the 'seventies,
 of W.E. Sheridan, an American tragedian famous for his King Lear,^{or of}
 George Milne, also from America, who had graduated for the stage
 as a Unitarian minister.

Besides my budget of letters from playgoers I was also the
 recipient of numerous letters from scholars and enthusiasts
 requesting my opinion on various Shakespearean niceties. The
 alternative reading of a line or phrase; did I favour the wording
 of the first folio or the second quarto in such and such a
 passage, etc.? On one occasion I was forwarded the ^{manuscript} MSS of a
 book on Shakespeare with a request to write a preface, one chapter
 of which dealt with the all too frequent misquotation of Shakes-
 peare and emphasizing that if one quoted from Shakespeare one,
 at least, owed it to the author to quote him correctly. Very
 true, but I had to point out to the compiler of this original
 work that there were no less than three glaring misquotations
 in the very chapter in which he castigated this common failing !

Another considerable section of my mail consisted of applica-
 tions from would-be Thespians, their most common characteristic
 being a total lack of elementary essentials necessary for a stage
 career. Of letters of this type I think the following, received
 by me in Perth (^{Western Australia} W.A.), contains surely the most extraordinary
 qualifications ever submitted to a Shakespearean actor-manager
^{by} as a potential recruit to the stage. I give it with the
 original spelling and punctuation:

"Dear Sir,

I am writing to you and asking for your advice. I was told by a man who was showing moving pictures in the country, that if I joined a company I would be able to make a good wage, but I was not allowed to leave home as I was young. Now that work is hard to get, I am thinking of joining a company. Now my jaws are double-jointed and I can move them as I like. They can move to the right or left, and I can move the face into a lot of shapes and forms while moving the jaws, it does not hurt in any way. Do you think I would be able to get work in the companies or on the stage, but I cannot act, but I was told after a little study I would be able to act. I would not trouble you if I knew the address of the man who told me I would be able to get the work. I would like to know as soon as possible for I am thinking of going back to the country on Friday, if nothing turns up so I am sending you an envelope and stamp. The jaws can move quick or slow as I like and it is easy to turn the face as the jaws are moving. Hoping that I am not taking your time. I can keep the forehead moving as the jaws are moving, and the eyes still while the jaws, and the forehead are moving, and the mouth open. The managers may not think I am any good, but it is no good looking for work, if I can get work in a company. One of the Hipbones are double-jointed and often cracks while walking. I remain, Yours truly."

It is my lifelong regret that my imminent departure from

Perth prevented me from interviewing my correspondent and having a private demonstration of his extraordinary gifts.

Owing to the prejudice on the part of the Lord Chamberlain to licensing plays introducing biblical characters, I was compelled to decline the offer of a play on a strikingly original theme as contained in this epistle:

"Will you kindly inform me if you can stage a play for me if I write it. It will be the true story of the life of the Lord Jesus as given to me (by wireless) from the Planet Mars which is Paradise. It is different to the Bible story, and I am sure it will be a great success. I am, Yours faithfully."

Another spiritualistic crank wrote me (his letter is too long to quote verbatim) that he was in constant communication with the Spirit of Shakespeare, and that Shakespeare had asked the writer to convey to me his gratitude for the manner in which I was keeping his works alive in Australia and that my method of presenting his plays and my individual performances had his fullest approbation. Altogether he was delighted with me. If only I were a believer in the cult what a proud man I should be !

A letter received from an old chap in Perth (~~W.A.~~) is not quite of so commendatory a nature:

"Sir,

I am going along to see you worry through Henry the Fifth tomorrow. I expect to be disappointed in my outlay.

I may state that I had the privilege of travelling through America during 1878 with the Rignold combination and he, George Rignold was the only Henry the Fifth during his lifetime. In U.S.A., he was called Handsome George. He had a fine stage appearance and was a fine actor.

I hope to be able to say as much of you after tomorrow. I will be a very close observer.

With kind wishes for your success,

Yours respectfully,

R. S. W.

76 years old on the 5th of August next."

As I heard no further from the old gentleman I am afraid he could not say as much for me, but, at any rate, he did not ask me to recompense him for his "outlay".

Towards the end of 1928 Australia was one of the first countries to experience, as it was one of the first to recover from, the world-wide economic depression which had a very serious reaction upon the theatre, and for the next two years I was fighting a losing battle only relieved by one or two minor victories.

As conditions were at this time said to be a little better in New Zealand I made a double tour of the Dominion in 1929, first with Shakespeare and then return seasons with the Old Comedies. Business was, however, consistently poor with both repertoires, with the exception of two phenomenal seasons I played

in the little town of Nelson. It was my first visit to Nelson, as besides being rather difficult of access, situated as it is in an isolated position on the north coast of the South Island, it had only recently acquired a suitable theatre for staging big productions. Nelson is perhaps the most charming town in New Zealand and rejoices in a delightful climate with an average of eight and a quarter hours of sunshine daily; ~~but~~ its population was only 12,000, ^{but} ~~and here~~ we played with my Shakespearean repertoire for a week to £1,600. When we returned three months later with the Old Comedy repertoire, the receipts for three nights were little short of £800. I quote these figures which for those days and considering the size of Nelson and the business conditions prevailing in New Zealand generally, were extraordinary.

A couple of days after we left Nelson the great New Zealand earthquake of 1929 occurred, and the hotel in which my wife and I had stopped in Nelson was partially wrecked. We were at a safe distance at the time, some hundreds of miles away, playing a small town in the Hawkes Bay district of the North Island. On the morning of our arrival in this town, as my wife and I were walking down the centre of the main street, we were both astonished and flattered to see all the inhabitants rushing from their houses and shops to gaze at their famous visitors. Or so we imagined for the moment, but were soon disillusioned when we realized they were merely collecting in the roadway for safety, as their buildings were swaying from the effect of the slight

earth waves extending from the great 'quake then taking place in the South Island.

It was during this tour, while visiting the isolated little town of Whangarei in the northernmost part of New Zealand, ^{that} I made the acquaintance of a very charming man, Mr. Reid, a retired chemist of the town, who late in life had developed a passionate admiration for the works of the elder Dumas. Finding that only a small portion of the works of that most prolific of writers had been translated into English, he sold out his very prosperous business, made an exhaustive study of the French language, of which he previously had little or no knowledge, and was now devoting the remainder of his life to the enormous task of a comprehensive translation of the hundreds of novels, plays, etc., of his literary idol. To assist him in his work and also out of his love for Dumas, he had gradually collected what must be probably one of the finest private Dumas libraries in the world, consisting as it does not only of many rare editions of ~~Dumas~~ in French and English, but also a large number of ^{his} ~~Dumas~~ original ^{manuscripts} MSS which he purchased through his agents in Europe and America whenever they came into the market. This magnificent collection is bequeathed to the Auckland Public Library.

In Feilding, another little town in New Zealand, I came across a fanatical Jacobite who published at his own expense a two sheet newspaper which made its appearance every three months, price sixpence, under the title of "The Jacobite", championing

the cause of the Stuarts and giving whatever sparse information there might be of the descendants of that luckless House. A newspaper with this romantic *raison d'être* would be extraordinary enough in any part of the world in the twentieth century, but the last place one would expect to find such a publication is an obscure little town at the Antipodes.

Yet another unusual character I met with in New Zealand, on the West Coast though in a very different category to the others I have described, was a youth who used to hang about the theatre in the small decayed mining town of Hokitika. The poor fellow was a sort of village idiot with not even the mentality of a child of six in ordinary matters, but he had the singular gift of being able to answer the most abstruse and complicated mathematical problems in a flash, as if by intuition rather than any mental process, which any ordinary individual would take about five minutes to work out with the aid of a sheet of paper and a pencil. A quite useless gift for any practical purposes except that it used to earn him small sums from the occasional visitors to Hokitika who were curious to test his powers as a natural mathematician.

There is no business in which it is so impossible to forecast results and which is so capable of upsetting all one's calculations as that of the theatre. *Experientia docet*, but not in the entertainment world, for a wide experience, the nicest deliberations and the best laid plans are confounded over and over

again by the curious psychology of the public whose attitude may be guessed but can never be foreseen with any degree of certainty. But while the vagaries of the public are responsible for many disappointments and heartbreaks to the theatrical manager they do, if infrequently, occasion pleasant and astounding surprises.

The most remarkable instance of the latter happened to me in the early part of 1930, when I crossed over to Melbourne from Tasmania to play a brief season at the King's Theatre. By this time conditions in Australia were really serious. There were only two other theatres open in Melbourne and both were doing very badly. For my own part, when I landed in Melbourne I was absolutely broke. I had managed to pay the fares for my company from Launceston, but had not the wherewithal to pay the freight on my scenery which for some days lay on the quay at Melbourne before I could scrape together the amount necessary to pay the dues, just in time to get it into the theatre for my opening night.

Now occurred one of those freaks of fortune that defy all logical explanation and appear to be only possible in the theatrical world. My last season in Melbourne with Shakespearean repertoire had been disastrous and I was pinning my faith this time to a season of Old English Comedies, even though on a previous occasion when conditions were prosperous they had failed to attract. Now with my affairs terribly involved, theatrical conditions appalling, and the outlook seemingly hopeless, I opened with "The School for Scandal" to a crowded house and the theatre

was packed night after night to its utmost capacity. Every reserved seat was booked at each performance and the queues outside the theatre held up the traffic, photographs of which were reproduced in the press throughout Australia, such interest and astonishment did my season arouse. When by all the laws of judgement and reason I should have utterly ^acrushed, I cleared over £3,000 profit in a five weeks' season which, while most of it went alas ! in paying off my liabilities, was sufficient to give me a new lease of managerial life.

My Melbourne season, however, was my final spurt of good fortune and as conditions became steadily worse I decided that only a bold experiment might possibly save the situation, ^{so} and I commissioned a well-known Sydney authoress to write a play for me that I imagined would have a big local appeal. The subject we chose was an intensely dramatic episode in the early history of ^{New South} N.S. Wales, in which Governor Bligh (Bligh of the Bounty) was the central figure. I staged this play in Sydney where the whole of the action was laid, and went to great trouble and the limit of my resources in having all the scenes and uniforms reproduced from old prints of early Sydney, ~~and the play being very workman-like and full of dramatic incident was exceedingly well received.~~ Descendants of Bligh and his chief opponent McArthur and other prominent figures in the drama were still living in Sydney and neighbourhood, so that the play aroused immense controversy between the rival factions, and columns of matter from both

parties appeared in the press throughout the run of the play, so that it received much gratuitous advertisement.

The play was very workmanlike and full of dramatic incident; but

But the times were out of joint, and although I have little doubt that under more favourable conditions ^{it} the play would have had a happier fate; ^{we} it played to indifferent business and ^{were} was even less successful when I transferred the production to the Princess Theatre, Melbourne.

This was the beginning of the end. I revived some of the popular plays of my repertoire and concluded with the same play, "The Merchant of Venice", and at the same theatre, that I had launched my first Shakespearean season in Australia. "Time had come round", and I was sadly and reluctantly compelled to disband my company.

It was with great grief that I did so, for apart from the pride and joy I took in doing work which had so frequently been described as of national importance, it was a great wrench to part with the men and women of my company, many of whom had worked with me during the whole period of my management in Australia, and some of whom, approaching the sere and yellow, would find it difficult to obtain other employment.

~~Owing to stringent financial economies on the part of the Australian Governments most of the railway facilities I had been granted had been curtailed and with therefore increased expenses, greatly decreased receipts, and my own financial resources utterly exhausted I had no option but to break up my organization.~~

Had conditions remained normal I think I am justified in believing that I should have attained my ambition of producing all the plays of Shakespeare in Australia. That I ^{had been} was able to continue for ten years and produced twenty-seven of the plays, with the limited population and the conditions under which I worked, is to the infinite credit of the Australian people.

 it required considerable preparation and the adoption of a different technique. At first we missed the glamour and the thrill which the atmosphere of a theatre engenders, but we found, after we had grown accustomed to the altered conditions, that there were compensating factors in the satisfaction of holding and entertaining an audience for a couple of hours without the adventitious aids of a supporting company, scenery, costumes and other stage accessories.

However, we still felt the lure of the theatre, and in the early part of 1931 I decided to undertake once more the risks of management. But this time it was to be a couple of short cast modern plays, which, with the small expenses as compared to Shakespearean productions, I hoped might prove a profitable venture.